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# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

March 5, 2001

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By Salim Muwakkil



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# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

"... with liberty and justice for all"

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## Publisher's Notes

If we accept that unfettered corporate capitalism is a threat to democracy, then we are obliged to restructure our economy so it operates for the good of all people. To do so, we must first puncture the prevailing economic myths that erode democracy.

Throughout history myths have served as ideological glue for popular perception. These false or unproven collective beliefs serve to justify certain social arrangements. For example, the Manifest Destiny myth of the limitless American frontier served both as a philosophy for the expansion of opportunity as America's immigrant population grew rapidly and as a justification for seizing the property of indigenous people. Myths simplify how people perceive the world, perniciously determining what people believe and what they do not. The myth of America as the cradle of constitutional democracy, for instance, flourished while slavery was an accepted practice.

Integral to the prevailing philosophy of utopian capitalism is the myth of the self-regulating marketplace. In the ideology of corporate capitalism, the marketplace supposedly dictates the solution to all problems. If businesses are unsure what benefits to provide employees, they are told to follow the wisdom of the market. Such thinking has led to a dramatic increase in the use of temporary employees who lack both job security and benefits. If governments are in conflict over what public services to provide, they are told to privatize and let the market sort it out. In Great Britain this has led to the deterioration of a once splendid train system.

This logic assumes that the market will solve each problem because it is operating as an objective, self-regulating economic force—part of the natural order in the universe of international economics. The fallacies in such an assumption are numerous. Because the marketplace operates under the limiting assumption that it exists to protect property rights, it conflicts with a concept of justice that places a greater value on human rights. Thus adhering to the law of the marketplace necessarily leads to actions that we view as unjust. For example, the decision to close a U.S. plant and lay off its

workers so production can be moved overseas, where wages are lower, makes sense from the standpoint of the market. This decision doesn't make sense to those who would place a great value on the right of workers to have a job that pays a living wage, rather than the desire of corporate stockholders to expand their wallets.

Further, the marketplace is not in fact self-regulating. Most economists agree that there must be central banks like the Federal Reserve to manage the international money supply. In many parts of the world, the operations of U.S. multinational corporations have long been protected by the U.S. military—hardly a natural mechanism. Further, some U.S. companies compete in the world marketplace with the help of government subsidies. One shining example is the export tax exemption that Congress passed in December, permitting companies like Boeing to avoid paying taxes on 15 to 30 percent of their export profits.

Lastly, corporations are falsely asserted to be part of a natural order. In fact, corporations are artificial legal structures, and therefore should be subject to the control of the citizens of the countries that authorize them. The problem is that once a corporation (or a trade organization such as WTO) is authorized, they begin to act as if they had all the rights of an individual. They become difficult to control. (More about this in my next column.)

Instead of accepting the myth of the self-regulating marketplace, we must strive to

**Instead of accepting the myth of the self-regulating marketplace, we must strive to envision economics with a human face.**

envision economics with a human face. Every aspect of the marketplace should be subject to common sense principles: Does this contribute to the common good? Does this organization promote true democracy?

In my next column, I'll examine two more myths, the "corporation as person" and the "level playing field."

*Bob Burnett*

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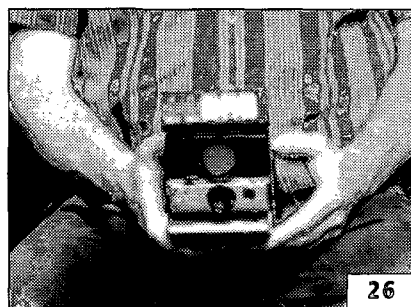
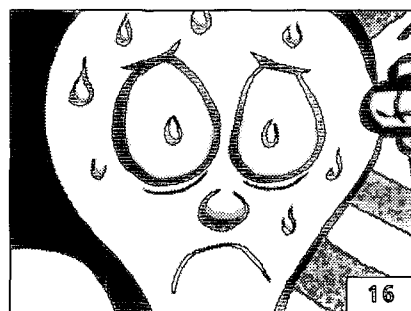
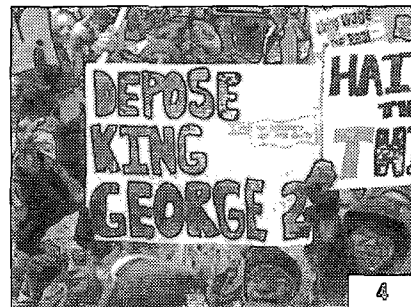
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# Letters

## Bleifuss Makes Me Ralph

Despite good critiques of Joel Bleifuss' anti-Nader irrationalism by other letter writers, he persists in his folly of attacking Nader and defending Gore on faulty grounds.

Nader raised the level of political debate and challenged the assumptions of Gore and the Democratic Leadership Council. All the Democrats could counter with were personal attacks and lies (like your article by Carl Pope of the Sierra Club inaccurately defending Gore's environmental record). Gore himself could not even take a stand on Elián Gonzalez, creationism in Kansas or even use of the designated hitter. He did not challenge anything—even Dubya—and that is really why he lost an election he should have won easily.

One does not have to be an absolutist to vote for an exemplary public citizen who is committed to progressive politics. I'm not canceling my subscription (Juan Gonzalez's piece on Vieques was worth the price of the last issue) but I expect *In These Times* to challenge the rightward and corporate drift of the Democrats instead of trying to further marginalize a progressive third party candidate and those of us who feel betrayed by eight years of Clinton and Gore.

**John Shaw**  
Tucson, Arizona

Wow, I can't believe it is the middle of January and the new *In These Times* is still debating Gore versus Nader. While part of me feels inclined to leave the whole issue behind me and begin building alliances to resist the conservative Bush regime, the other part of me feels the need to defend myself.

The Gore camp cannot stop attacking Nader and his supporters. The funny thing is that it is Bush who beat Gore, and it is Bush who is a particularly scary threat to progressives everywhere. Why don't Gore supporters get mad at Bush and the Republican Party?

The answer is simple: Progressives, while threatened by conservative politics, believe that Bush supporters truly voted for who they wanted to win. Nader voters, on the other hand, are seen as Democrats at

heart who simply wanted to teach their party a lesson. And according to Joel Bleifuss, that lesson was very poorly timed.

Well, I for one wasn't simply trying to teach the Democrats a lesson while secretly wishing Gore would win. As someone who strongly opposes globalization, the death penalty, imperialist sanctions against Iraq and Cuba, and other odious parts of U.S. foreign policy, I honestly



would not have been happy with Gore as the next president. I am certainly not happy about Bush winning, but the only possible outcome that seemed worth supporting was the Nader campaign.

**Stacey Falls**  
Pittsfield, Massachusetts

## Enough Already

The squabbling between Naderites and anti-Naderites is a tempest in a teapot and a destructive waste of time ("Letters," January 22). It disregards the fundamental issue, which is the pitiful weakness of the left. No amount of fratricidal sniping among us will make much difference in presidential elections or mainstream politics in general. The real failure is substantially to the right of us "real" leftists, whether pragmatic or puritanical. There's a yawning void between us and the conservative Democrats of the DLC. That could theoretically be filled by the Congressional Progressive Caucus, if it could ever manage to do anything more assertive than put out press releases.

With the death of liberalism, there's no coherent center-left in this country, and that's the only place any movement is possible. We on the farther left should do our best to contribute to the rebirth of such a center-left, maintaining a critical posture and always pointing to more radi-

cal solutions. We should stop deluding ourselves into thinking we have any direct political influence. And we should point our critical weapons at the right, not each other.

**Chris Nielsen**  
Portland, Oregon

## Elementary Questions

I work at a small, rural public school in a combined third- and fourth-grade class. Every week we get "free" copies of a school-sized version of *Time* magazine, which is rather loosely incorporated into our language arts program. It is, at least from my perspective, a vehicle for introducing future consumers into the world of corporate dominance.

Last week's edition featured a picture of George W. Bush on its cover and the headline "Bush Picks His Team." You may be interested in knowing that almost every one of our 19 students defaced this cover in some way. There were the usual blackened teeth, devil's horns and so forth, but a couple of the more creative students changed the headline to read "Bush Picks His Nose," with suitable graphic alterations to the photo. A grade-appropriate angle, I thought.

What I'm wondering is if the general media outlets continue to act as if nothing happened in Florida and Bush is the duly elected representative of the people, will people eventually come to believe that? Why couldn't *In These Times* come up with some sort of school publication that offered kids a different perspective?

**Mary Anderson**  
Humboldt County, California

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**Bob Burgess**  
Columbus, Ohio

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# Hardball on Soft Money

By Joel Bleifuss

**I**ronically, the first organized challenge to the George W. Bush's presidency is being spearheaded not by Ralph Nader, Jesse Jackson or another leader on the left, but by Republican John McCain, the Arizona senator and former Republican presidential candidate.

Last month McCain visited Arkansas in the first leg of a barnstorming tour of key states to ignite grassroots support for the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill.

Earlier in January, the reform measure's future was brightened by Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott's pledge not to filibuster the McCain-Feingold legislation, as the Republicans have done previously, and to allow a two-week debate on the issue in March. This was not so much a goodwill gesture as a recognition that McCain and Russ Feingold (D-Wisconsin) were close to getting the 60 votes needed to stop a filibuster.

McCain-Feingold bans unregulated soft money (unlimited contributions to political parties) and restricts the ability of independent issue groups to run television ads supporting or opposing a particular candidate. Many Republicans, including President George W. Bush, oppose the measure, viewing it as one step down the slippery slope of reform, which it is. Instead Bush and friends support a "reform" that bans soft money contributions from unions and corporations, but leaves soft money donations from rich individuals intact. This would hurt Democrats who depend on union dollars. In the last election cycle, the Democrats raised \$243 million in soft money, and the Republicans took in \$244 million.

The campaign finance reform community has been divided on the bill. Some groups support pursuing partial reforms like McCain-Feingold. Others, such as Public Campaign, set as their goal public funding of campaigns, as is currently mandated in Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts and Arizona.

The two goals are not mutually exclusive. "We see this as an important incremental step toward full public

financing," says Steve Weissman of Public Citizen. "Any public financing program will be meaningless without a ban on soft money." Similarly, he says, public funding of campaigns will have little effect unless you also have bans on sham issue advertisements.

Public Citizen is one of about 25 groups—including Common Cause, the American Association of Retired People and the Sierra Club—in Americans for Reform, a coalition effort that hopes to translate McCain's national tour into passage of the bill.

McCain is firmly committed, motivated by both an intense dislike of Bush and a passionate belief that, as he has put it, the American political system "has become dominated by the special interests and the average American citizen is no longer represented."

McCain showed up in Arkansas to put heat on Republican Sen. Tim Hutchinson, a McCain-Feingold fence-sitter who is up for re-election in 2002. On February 13, McCain will visit

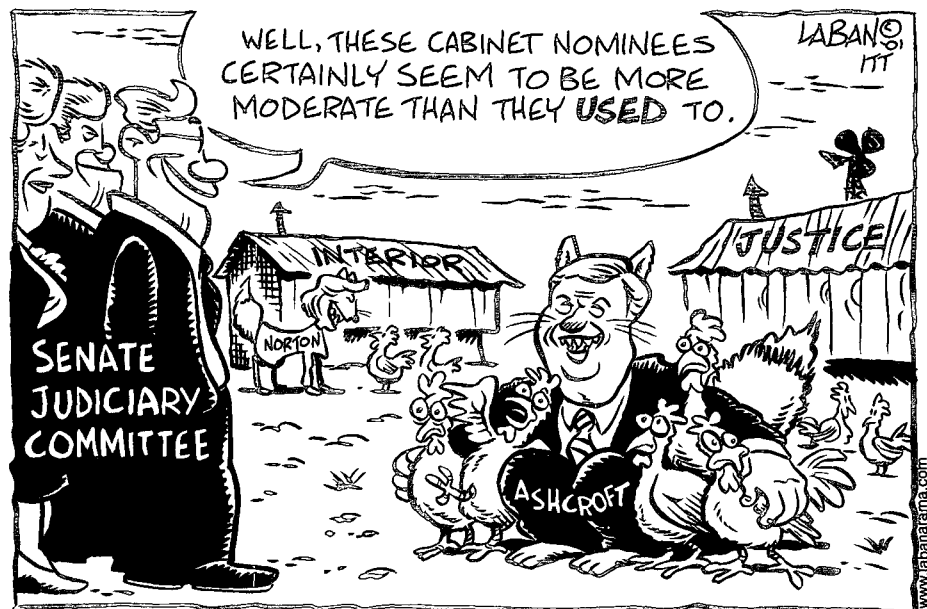
Illinois to put pressure on Republican Sen. Peter Fitzgerald. Other states on the tour include Sen. Gordon Smith's home state of Oregon and Sen. Bob Smith's New Hampshire. Both Republicans are up for re-election in 2002. Other stops may include Colorado and New Jersey.

Common Cause is coordinating the campaign, since as a rule senators do not take kindly to their colleagues politicking against them in their own district. "This is the wrong way to put me in their camp. You don't enhance your chances of getting someone's vote by going in to organize a pressure campaign," Hutchinson told the *Washington Post*. Or at least no senator is going to admit that is how he gave you his vote.

**Republicans oppose the measure, viewing it as one step down the slippery slope of reform—which it is.**

The strategy is sound, but its execution has proven difficult in the past. In the early '80s, the anti-nuclear-weapons Freeze campaign failed to translate its vast public support into ballot-box clout. But should McCain-Feingold not pass, Americans for Reform will be free to run independent issue advertisements that highlight the dismal voting records of those senators who voted against campaign finance reform. ■

Terry LaBan





## Illegitimate Son

### George W. Bush's coronation provokes largest inaugural protest since Richard Nixon

By Geov Parrish

WASHINGTON—Presidential inaugurations are a peculiar combination of civic ecstasy and the celebration of raw power—like enthralled high-school students on field trips watching a Soviet May Day-style parade for corporate democracy. There's the ostentatious swearing-in ceremony, the Pennsylvania Avenue procession of floats, marching bands and military hardware, the sharpshooters on the roofs, and the stretch limos pulling up to a bazillion-dollars-per-ticket gala inaugural ball.

All these festivities are a self-congratulatory public reminder that "We Are The Greatest Government In The History Of The World." Privately, meanwhile, Inauguration Day is a series of wild parties for whichever clique will be pillaging taxpayers for the next four years. For more sober observers, it's all just a reminder that while you can watch once every four years for a few hours, Washington power is really an ongoing series of parties to which you're not invited.

All modern-day U.S. inaugurations, regardless of the victorious party, are like this. George W. Bush's 2001 bash, however, had a third element, an uninvited and largely unreported one, as studiously ignored by other party-goers as a loudly drunk neighbor the hosts hope will simply go home. Among the estimated 300,000 people that gathered in the light rain at the Capitol and along Pennsylvania Avenue, tens of thousands of people expressed their belief that the whole thing was a fraud. It was the largest inaugural protest since Nixon. In 1973, anti-inaugural crowds, assembling far

away from the parade, were swelled by a well-organized movement angered by an unpopular war. This year, there was no such organization and Dubya hadn't even had a chance to step in the Oval Office with his new boots yet.

But the protesters came from near and far, and, unlike 1973, they could get up close to Pennsylvania Avenue—thanks to a 1997 court ruling allowing anti-abortion groups access to Bill Clinton's parade. This year at least 20 mostly obscure groups planned protests. They announced five different, distinct locations (or just "along Pennsylvania

vasive security and uninterested networks. Alongside them were many others concerned about a variety of issues that transcended Gore and Bush. The dozens of causes all melded into one message, unmistakably delivered in block after block of the parade route: As president, Bush has no right to pursue the right-wing policies he wants. He is, according to the words of one memorable sign, the illegitimate son.

It was difficult to gauge the actual size of the anti-Bush demonstrations, and so mostly the networks, reporters and pundits didn't even try. They were content

to mention it in passing, like some unfortunate, unavoidable irritant—and content to get comments from appalled Bush supporters and to adopt the Republican thesis that these were "sore losers." If so, the losers were everywhere, making up a large percentage, and in many places a majority, of the crowd.

In Bush's uninspiring, meandering, flatly delivered inaugural speech—evoking nothing so much as a teen-ager rendering the homework assignment his clueless father penned late the previous night—he mentioned citizens sometimes seeming to "share a continent, not a country," a reference that could as easily refer to his divisive policy proposals. That was the new president's only gesture toward Americans embittered by the way he won the election. If anything, the prominent ceremonial role played by Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky), husband of Labor Secretary Elaine Chao and the primary architect of all opposition to campaign finance reform, suggested Dubya's contempt for the entire topic of electoral reform, and a fundamental lack of concern for "healing."

The parade route was littered with people who will remember that lack of concern. As the Bushes rode and then walked up Pennsylvania Avenue, they passed solidly pro-Bush bleachers (these were the paid tickets, at \$50 and



Protesters confront the passing presidential limo.

Avenue") at which confused anti-Bush citizens could assemble.

Only five weeks earlier, Al Gore's supporters, buoyed by the Florida Supreme Court ruling, believed they'd be the ones marching and partying. Instead, they were shivering, waving signs like "Count My Vote" and "Hail to the Thief," marginalized by the per-



up), alternating with blocks that were either mixed or—especially close to the White House—solidly anti-Bush. Somehow, this became, according to one radio reporter, “hundreds of protesters”; according to most others, a few thousand. The *Washington Post* managed to work in the familiar reference to protesters’ piercings. But the anti-Bush signs were much more widespread, and their bearers more demographically varied, than most inaugural coverage suggested.

The inauguration’s unprecedented heavy security—the Secret Service surrounded the parade route with ten security checkpoints all parade-goers had to pass through—was mounted in large part because nobody knew what to expect. As it turned out, the massive police presence was unnecessary, and the protests were exactly as advertised: an almost entirely peaceful display of opposition to Bush. Somehow, the lack of conflict between police and protesters, and the lack of prominent names attached to their cause, made the protesters’ message less important to reporters.

Such dismissiveness both missed the point and the significance of the demonstrations, and starkly showed how difficult it will be for citizen groups alarmed by one or another Bush policy in the next four years to be heard. With the exception of the National Organization for Women—which comprised a boisterous pro-choice cluster between 8th and 9th Streets—the traditional Democratic Party constituencies one would expect to protest both the election and Bush’s prospective policies were strikingly absent. There was no labor or environmental presence at all. Even vocal election critics like Jesse Jackson had taken a pass; before his personal scandal erupted, Jackson had planned to attend a rally in Tallahassee, far away from the cameras.

Instead, the election-themed protesters were mobilized through the Internet by vaporous “groups” like VoterMarch.org and Countercoup.org, entities that had never met face-to-face and had come together expressly for the purpose of protesting the inauguration. Further to the left, organizers like the Justice Action Movement, the International Action Center and the

media celebrity Rev. Al Sharpton helped bring people to Washington. But they sported few, if any, “followers” in the traditional sense.

The lack of organizational backing made these protests more impressive, not less. There was no legislation pending, no war raging, no recession (so far). And all the “sponsors” did was provide permits. Yet tens of thousands of dissenters found their way to Washington on their own volition, and without any apparent policy goal beyond the desire to display opposition to a regime that had not yet even taken office. And in Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles, thousands more also protested.

Opponents of Dubya’s policies will remember this—and they will remember that after having the election yanked out from under them, congressional Democrats have displayed almost no opposition to an array of Bush cabinet nominees that is anything but moderate and bipartisan. There is a potentially powerful movement brewing. But nobody is harnessing it, and nobody in power is championing it. Yet. ■

## Cruel School

The new Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, formerly known as the School of the Americas (SOA), opened at Fort Benning, Georgia on January 17 amid continuing criticism of the U.S. role in training foreign militaries. “It’s like ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes,’” says Father Roy Bourgeois, founder of SOA Watch. “We know that the ‘new clothes’ are invisible and the school has not changed.”

At the opening, six college students and one parent who attempted to block the road to the school and carried a coffin to the reopening ceremony were arrested. Two of the students, Rebecca Johnson and Laurel Paget-Seekins of Oberlin College, previously had been banned from the base due to other acts of civil disobedience and now could face six months in federal prison and a \$5,000 fine. SOA Watch’s annual November protest at Fort Benning attracted 10,000 people last year.

The SOA helped train more than 63,000 members of Latin American armed forces—including Manuel Noriega, cronies of Augusto Pinochet and Salvadoran death squad leaders—and became known

## Gore Got More

### Newspapers add it up and uncover Florida’s real winner

By Hans Johnson

WASHINGTON—Call it the magic moment that never came. From election night, when Bush cousin and Fox election analyst John Ellis first gave Florida to Dubya, to December 12, when a five-member bloc on the Supreme Court ratified the GOP’s fuzzy math and handed Bush the White House, no vote tally from Tallahassee showed Al Gore ahead. Despite a widening margin in the national popular vote that eventually reached 540,000 votes, a raft of GOP lawyers, public officials and spinmeisters made sure that he never assumed even the most fleeting lead.

But ongoing news investigations of 180,000 uncounted presidential ballots in Florida are beginning to rain on Bush’s honeymoon. An inquiry by the

as the “School of the Assassins.” Recently, Colombian graduates have been linked to paramilitaries and implicated in human-rights atrocities in that country’s growing civil war.

The new institute, proposed by the Clinton administration and approved by Congress last year, is billed as a response to the growing movement to shut the school down. But it is essentially the same program under a different name. It will continue to train Latin American military officers in combat, counterinsurgency and counternarcotics. The program also will continue some mild reforms already implemented into the curriculum, such as requiring eight hours of human rights courses.

Bourgeois, however, considers the changes cosmetic. “I’d like to know why the SOA’s recent human rights courses have had difficulty attracting students,” he says, “and how those few students who successfully completed the courses have applied what they learned. There is no reason to believe that, with presumably the same curriculum and faculty as the SOA, the new school will be any different.”

Alex Davidson



Orlando Sentinel, South Florida Sun-Sentinel and Chicago Tribune of approximately 16,000 discarded overvotes and undervotes from 15 small, mostly rural counties show Gore picking up at least 366 votes from ballots on which voters' intentions were easily determined. Many such votes come from ballots containing both a vote registered next to Gore's name and another vote for him scrawled in longhand in the space for write-ins. Though counted in a few counties and in most other states, such ballots were tossed out by at least nine Florida counties. When added to the votes the Florida Supreme Court tacked onto statewide totals in its short-lived December 8 ruling, the results of this small sampling alone would have tipped the state to Gore.

The Washington Post and the Miami Herald also are conducting examinations of overvotes and undervotes throughout the state. In an initial analysis of overvotes from eight Florida

counties, only half of which went to Gore, the Post reported that Gore was selected on more than 46,000 ballots while Bush was chosen on only 17,000. These voters favored Democrat Bill Nelson in the state's closely contested U.S. senate race by a margin of almost 3-to-1, reinforcing the notion that Gore suffered due to the exclusion of all these ballots from the state's presidential vote totals.

Conservatives have attempted to make hay from one survey by the Palm Beach Post in early January of the 10,500 undervotes in Miami-Dade County. That inquiry, which some Democrats had once predicted would yield a small pickup for Gore, actually produced a net gain of 6 votes for Bush. Yet the tide of subsequent disclosures suggests that Gore was massively shortchanged in Florida. Indeed, the conclusion that he was unfairly denied the White House is slowly progressing from a fringe conviction to mathematical fact. ■

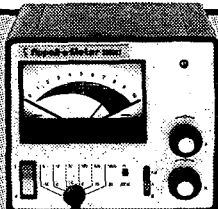
## Secret Agent Man

### Iran-Contra operative Richard Armitage is now Colin Powell's No. 2

By Jim Naureckas

The last time a Republican administration was put together, there were only two political appointees who didn't make it through the confirmation process. One was John Tower, the elder President Bush's ill-fated pick to head the Defense Department. The other was Richard L. Armitage.

Armitage, who served as an assistant secretary of defense under President Reagan, was to be the new administration's secretary of the Army. Before his nomination could come to a vote, however, he withdrew his name, citing the



## Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle

### The Defense Rests 9.7

If you're being tried for murder, it's generally a good idea for your lawyer to be awake. That seemingly uncontroversial legal principle is being put to the test in the case of Calvin Burdine, a gay man sentenced to death in Texas for the 1983 murder of his ex after a trial in which his court-appointed lawyer, the late Joe Cannon, repeatedly fell asleep for "substantial" periods of time, according to state judges.

A federal appeals court is currently reviewing the case—after a panel of three federal judges ruled last October that the lawyer's naps hadn't interfered with Burdine's right to a fair trial. The Texas prosecutor maintains that Cannon's sleeping didn't make the verdict "unreliable" because any errors the lawyer made weren't "systemic." Burdine's lawyers note that it's hard to get a decent defense from a lawyer who is "no more sentient than a potted plant."

One of the key issues in the case, the gay and lesbian news service PlanetOut notes, is whether Cannon's unconsciousness allowed the prosecutors to appeal

to jurors' homophobia: "Among the prosecutor's statements Cannon did not object to [because he was asleep] was an inflammatory argument in the sentencing hearing that Burdine should be executed because life imprisonment was not such a bad thing for a homosexual."

Burdine, who says his "confession" was the result of police intimidation, came close to being executed in 1987 before getting a last-minute reprieve.

### Flagging Enthusiasm 7.2

Flag-waving patriotism: It's not just a good idea—it's the law! James McGreevey, the Democratic mayor of Woodbridge, New Jersey, and a likely candidate for governor, apparently thought the best way to illustrate our country's love of liberty was to force new businesses to fly the American flag, the Washington Times reports. But slightly cooler heads prevailed, after a protest from the ACLU, and the Woodbridge Town Council ultimately approved an amended version of McGreevey's resolution, one that merely "encourages" flag flying.

### Marching On 8.1

Faced with shortages of food and fuel, but something of a surplus of snow and cold weather, the North Korean government is trying to convince the masses that marching in the snow is "very much in vogue in streets and villages," Reuters reports.

"March to the revolutionary battlefields is ... an important item of winter sports," the Korean Central News Agency recently declared. "Particularly the march through the snowy road is regarded as a good opportunity to cultivate the bravery and strong will among students."

Are the Olympics next? Snow marching may not be much of a sport, but it still makes more sense than synchronized swimming.



TERRY LABAN

traditional need to spend more time with his family. Perhaps more relevant was the draft of an article of mine that had just been shown by a right-wing Republican senator to a top Pentagon official. Co-authored by Richard Ryan, this article never appeared in print, but the threat that it would soon be published apparently convinced Armitage and the administration that the confirmation process would not be worth the trouble.

The article was about Armitage's relationship with a woman named Nguyet Thi O'Rourke, a Vietnamese immigrant convicted of running a gambling operation in Northern Virginia. Armitage had already attracted the attention of the President's Commission on Organized Crime by writing a glowing character reference for her in conjunction with her trial, on Pentagon stationery no less. What our article added was the juicy personal angle that has become a requirement for killing a nomination. It seemed that when the Arlington Police raided O'Rourke's house, they discovered some unusual photographs: They showed a nude O'Rourke holding another photo, which depicted her and Armitage wearing swimsuits.

The most obvious motive for taking such photos was to give O'Rourke some kind of leverage over Armitage; even though they didn't prove anything in themselves, they certainly implied an intimate relationship between a high-ranking government official and an organized crime figure. At the very least, they raised the question of why the official had put himself in a position where a mobster might think she could blackmail him.

Why was a Republican senator showing this article to the Pentagon? There were people on the right, like Ross Perot, who were deeply suspicious of Armitage and his involvement in MIA negotiations. Many conservatives believed that Vietnam still held U.S. prisoners in secret camps, and Armitage's failure to press the Vietnamese harder was seen as evidence of collusion.

Ryan and I, who personally thought it likely that the MIAs were all dead, nonetheless cultivated these conserva-

tive sources because their distaste for Armitage was much more intense than any liberal politician's. Perhaps unwisely, we shared an advance copy of our article with them, which became exhibit A in the senator's case against Armitage.

We were interested in Armitage because of his prominent role in the Christic Institute lawsuit. The lawsuit—which was eventually thrown out of court, with sanctions that crushed the nonprofit law firm—alleged that members of the secret Contra resupply effort like Richard Secord were part of a long-standing "Secret Team" of military and intelligence operatives that had been involved in various illegal activities going back at least to 1959.



Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage

According to the Christic Institute's affidavit, Armitage was a key player in this team, helping to funnel drug profits from Laos and Thailand into assassination programs in Vietnam and Iran. The Christic Institute's charges have never been proven, or fully investigated, for that matter. But Armitage's documented history and associations do tantalizingly track the Christic allegations (see "Pentagon Aide Linked to Drug Ring," July 8, 1987).

Armitage did come under investigation for his role in the Reagan administration's Iran-Contra scandal. Though he testified that he didn't know about the administration's secret sale of arms to Iran until November 1986, when they became public knowledge, independent counsel Lawrence Walsh's

report laid out extensive evidence that he knew about them a year earlier.

In fact, Armitage apparently opposed the arms sales as early as December 1985, on the grounds that Iranians were "sleazebags." Secord later testified that he met with Armitage then in an effort to change his mind. Armitage claimed not to remember meeting with Secord, though Armitage's own meeting logs show that he did. Armitage kept a December 6, 1985 document describing the legal ramifications of the Iran arms sales, entitled "Possibility for Leaks," locked in his Pentagon safe until June 1987, when it was belatedly turned over to Walsh and the congressional Iran-Contra committee.

Armitage also attended a Pentagon meeting in August 1986 in which Oliver North outlined the covert activities in support of the Contras that he had been supervising through the National Security Council. Armitage denied remembering anything about this meeting as well.

In his final report, Walsh said he declined to prosecute Armitage for his numerous dubious statements on these issues because he could not prove they were knowingly false.

The withdrawal of Armitage's nomination as Army secretary was by no means an exile. He went on to become a sort of trouble-shooter for the first Bush administration, serving as a special liaison to the Philippines and the Middle East. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, he oversaw U.S. aid programs to the former Soviet republics as a special ambassador. With the change to a Democratic administration, he moved into the role of Clinton critic and eventually an adviser to the Bush dynasty's heir.

Now Armitage's loyalty is being rewarded with a new post: He has been tapped as the new deputy secretary of state under Colin Powell, a longtime friend. It's unlikely that he'll run into trouble this time around. MIAs are no longer the issue they once were among the right, and, then as now, Democrats who are willing to ask the right questions are hard to find. ■

*Jim Naureckas, the editor of Extra!, covered the Iran-Contra scandal for In These Times.*



# Sweating It Out

## Nicaraguan women try to organize in a free trade zone

By Megan Rowling

LAS MERCEDES, NICARAGUA—The labels on the jeans piled high in this Nicaraguan sweatshop read "No Excuses," and you'd be hard pressed to find a convincing one for the way the workers here are treated. Sitting in rows on hard wooden benches, they toil away often for more than 12 hours a day. They don't talk; they don't smile. Toilet visits are timed, and some of the women have been forced to take pregnancy tests before getting a job. But the lawyer in charge of "labor rights" nonetheless keeps on repeating how happy they are. It doesn't look that way.

It's hot and stuffy, and a *Best of Chicago* album belts out over the sound system. It's maddening, but at least it masks the absence of human voices and the monotonous whining of the

machines. We're not allowed to talk to the workers, and when I ask to take pictures, the Chanel-swaddled PR woman for Nicaragua's Free Trade Zone Corporation snaps, "I don't think so."

The Las Mercedes free trade zone, situated on the outskirts of Managua, is home to 50 companies, mainly American and Taiwanese. The more than 19,700 workers here make clothes for large retailers, including Wal-Mart, Kmart, Target, J.C. Penney and Kohl's. In theory, the workers—who are mostly women—put in a 48-hour week, but nearly all sign a waiver permitting them to work overtime. If they don't, they won't make much more than \$72 a month, which is only about a third of what's needed to support an average family.

But workers aren't content with this kind of treatment from their employers, who rent factory space from the state-owned Free Trade Zone Corporation. The independent trade union for textile workers, the CST, has managed to gain some ground through collective bargaining. But last year many of its members were fired in a concerted

## Nurses Back to Work

McLaren Health Care Corporation and the nurses of AFSCME Local 875 reached a settlement January 19 that ended the 73-day nurses' strike in Flint, Michigan (see "Overtime Out," February 19). The new contract limits mandatory overtime to 16 hours per month until June, when it will be reduced to 8 hours per month. The contract also established pay equity among nurses, ensuring that veteran nurses get paid as much as new recruits.

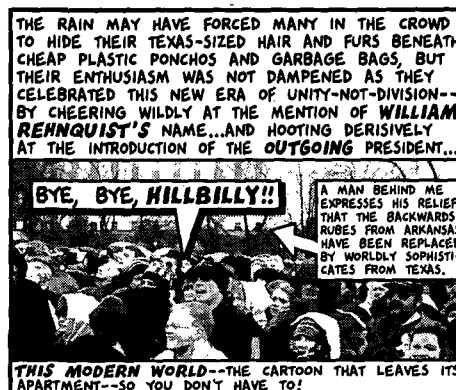
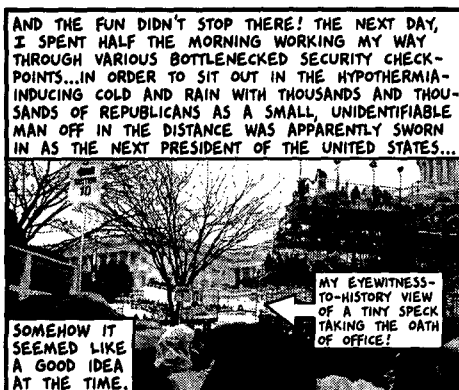
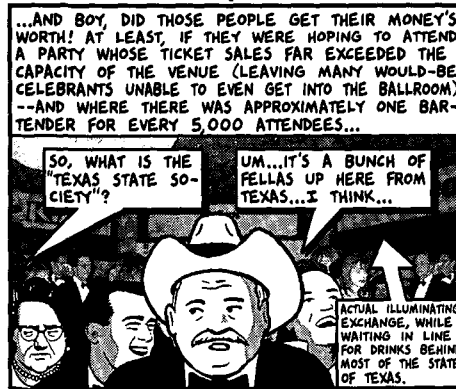
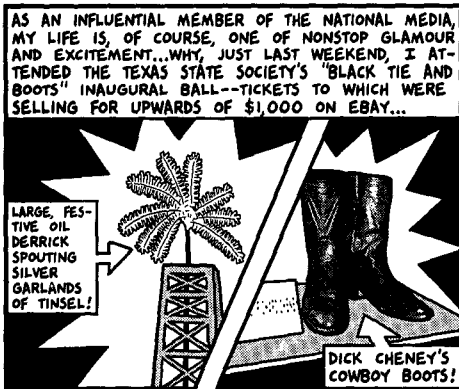
The nurses voted 357 to 46 in favor of the provisions, which took effect January 24, when about 600 RNs returned to their positions at McLaren Regional Medical Center. **Geeta Kharkar**

attempt at union busting. Union members at the Taiwanese-owned Chentex factory called a one-hour strike over management's refusal to negotiate a pay increase, for which the workers had been waiting for nine months. The strike resulted in the firing of hundreds of workers, and criminal charges were brought against union leaders. "You should see the way they treat us," says Gladys Manzanares, general secretary of the Chentex CST union. "They refer to us as delinquents."

As a result of campaigns initiated by the New York-based National Labor Committee and other labor rights organizations, consumers have put substantial pressure on retailers that source their garments from suppliers in Las Mercedes—and they have had some success. U.S.-owned factory Mil Colores agreed to reinstate the union leaders it fired earlier last year. CST and Chentex reached a verbal agreement in early January to reinstate two union officers and 128 union members, drop legal actions against them and sign a labor protocol. However, that agreement was jeopardized by a management-backed protest on January 11, in which 800 workers called for an end to the negative publicity campaign by activists and union leaders against the factory, citing fears that it may close due to a drop-off in orders. Management is now saying it will rehire only seven union members. "This is just another strategy to undermine the cause of workers and

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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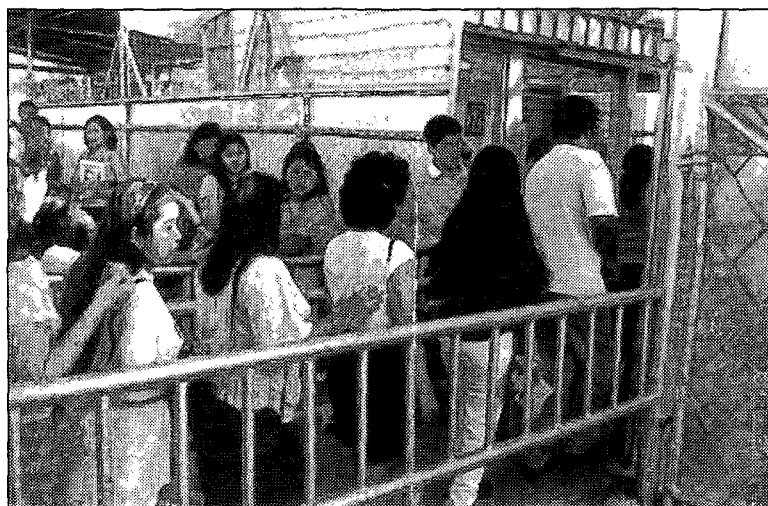
weaken the verbal agreement," Manzanares says.

The women working here struggle to make ends meet in the best of times. Many live in houses with no windows, no concrete floors, and sometimes no electricity. In order to pay for the education of her five children, Delia Soza, who works in quality control at Jem III, another U.S.-owned factory, obtained a loan to buy a freezer. She makes and sells food in what little spare time she has.

Her loan was provided by the Movement for Employed and Unemployed Women, or "Maria Elena Cuadra" (MEC), an organization that works with women in free trade zones to improve their pay and conditions. MEC aims to improve women's leadership and organizational skills through workshops, which include sessions on rights and gender, as well as legal training. It also runs credit programs, providing start-up capital for small business and home improvements.

Felicitia Castilla, a Chentex worker whose MEC training enables her to act as a "promoter" of rights in the factory, explains how mass firings have deterred many workers from joining unions. "Before, the whole plant was integrated into a trade union," she says. "But many left after the strike and people are now very fearful of organizing."

Union members argue that while MEC is doing positive work, it lacks the bargaining power and legal clout of unionized labor. But MEC does undertake a significant amount of lobbying work. MEC Director Sandra Ramos explains that the organization is currently working with lawyers on a proposal to upgrade the labor code, which was first introduced in 1985. Ramos adds that MEC does consult with the trade unions, but many women workers aren't comfortable in the male-dominated union environment. In the free trade zone factories, she says, where around 70 percent of the workers are female, "women have to get their voices heard at the negotiating table."



Chentex workers enter the free trade zone at Las Mercedes.

NATIONAL LABOR COMMITTEE

"We are not against trade unions," explains Rosa Marina Escobar, director of the Association of Women in Solidarity (AMES), a Guatemalan organization similar to MEC. "We just feel that there are other ways of working. If companies think trade unions are forming, there are massive firings. One day, it may be the answer, but we are still very far off."

AMES maintains that, for now, codes of conduct are the best tool for defending workers' rights. However, as Escobar emphasizes, "Unless we have some way of monitoring them, they are not worth anything."

As most codes of conduct are not legally enforceable, many big multinationals ignore them. One U.S. code that went swiftly out of fashion was the Clinton administration's Apparel Industry Partnership Code. Its low level of monitoring and enforcement disappointed many, especially unions, and lost their support. For women's organizations working on the ground in Central America, however, picking and choosing codes is a luxury. While they recognize the shortcomings of codes, they are eager to protect the jobs that the free trade zones provide. Aggressive championing of trade unions could lead the multinationals to move to another country where workers are more submissive. Codes, of course, are much less threatening.

"Companies operating in the free trade zones don't pay any taxes, so why can't they pay us well?" Manzanares asks. "If they paid decent money, we could feed ourselves, build houses, send our kids to school—and that is national development. We don't think the free trade zones are bad. We just need to make them work." ■

## The New Abolitionists

Supporters of the Illinois death penalty moratorium celebrated its one-year anniversary on January 31 at a rally in Chicago, calling for increased examination of the criminal justice system and an end to capital punishment. "It's clear to me that even with reforms one cannot be sure that an innocent person will not be executed," says Alice Kim, a local organizer for the Campaign to End the Death Penalty. "Given that as the case, I believe we cannot have a death penalty."

Last year, Gov. George Ryan declared the Illinois death penalty system seriously flawed and initiated the moratorium on executions. A year earlier, he had appointed an investigative panel after Death Row inmate Anthony Porter was exonerated two days before he was scheduled to be put to death.

In a related matter, the Illinois Supreme Court adopted a series of

reforms for the state's death penalty system as part of an ongoing effort to examine the process of capital punishment and help prevent future wrongful convictions. Specifically, lead defense attorneys will be required to have a minimum of five years of litigation experience, including eight felony jury trials (with at least two of them murder trials) before taking on a death penalty case. Also, the new Capital Litigation Trial Bar, independent of local judges, will decide if a lawyer is qualified to accept a capital punishment case.

Kim, who spoke at the rally along with the Rev. Jesse Jackson, says their goal is to build a movement to abolish the death penalty. "We deserve a criminal justice system that doesn't put innocent people to death," Kim says. "We deserve better than what we have."

Alex Davidson



# Viva Las Vegas

## UFCW launches national drive to unionize Wal-Mart

By Geoff Schumacher

LAS VEGAS—The United Food and Commercial Workers union recently launched a nationwide organizing campaign aimed at Wal-Mart, the world's second-largest corporation. The 1.4 million-member union's initial target is Las Vegas, where interest in representation is high among Wal-Mart employees. "The workers in Las Vegas have been especially eager to organize," says Jill Cashen, spokeswoman for the union, whose members are concentrated in supermarkets, meatpacking, poultry and other food processing industries.

Organizing Wal-Mart has been an ominous task because of employees transience and the discount chain's aggressive anti-union tactics. When seven butchers at a Wal-Mart in Jacksonville, Texas voted last year to form a union, the company promptly announced it was closing meat departments in 180 stores across the nation (see "Wal-Mart's," May 15, 2000).

However, the organizing effort appears to be moving forward in Las Vegas, where dozens of UFCW members have been meeting with Wal-Mart workers in hopes that they will attain a federally sanctioned union vote. "There's a core group in Las Vegas who are really long-term employees and want to stay put," Cashen says.

The Wal-Mart employees leading the union drive are using the Internet to help get out their message. Their Web site ([www.walmartworkerslv.com](http://www.walmartworkerslv.com)) features detailed critiques of Wal-Mart's wage scales, medical plan and union-busting tactics. It also keeps local employees informed about organizing efforts at stores in other communities. One recent report on the Web site rebuts an anti-union video that Wal-Mart is showing to employees.

Las Vegas is a logical first battleground for the UFCW because of the heavy union presence in the city's resorts and supermarkets. The aggressive

Culinary Workers Local 226, for example, has more than 50,000 members working in Las Vegas hotels and casinos.

Wal-Mart is the world's largest private employer with 1.14 million workers. Its 1999 total sales of \$166.8 billion exceed the gross national product of Poland, Norway, Indonesia and South Africa.

Despite such dramatic profits, Wal-Mart is notorious for low pay and costly medical benefits. It also has a monopolistic growth strategy that has put many mom-and-pop competitors out of business. After invading Great Britain in 1999, Wal-Mart recently announced plans to open its first store in Japan.

Wal-Mart got the UFCW's attention a few years ago when the company decided to add full-service supermarkets to many of its discount department stores. UFCW has longstanding contracts with all the major grocery chains in Las Vegas. UFCW members in Las Vegas earn \$10 to \$15 per hour, while Wal-Mart employees typically make half that much.

The UFCW's first foray against Wal-Mart in Las Vegas was a county zoning ordinance last year that effectively banned the mammoth Wal-Mart supercenters (see "Las Vegas vs. Wal-Mart,"

October 3, 1999). But Wal-Mart sued, and the Clark County Commission, under pressure from conservative activists, later rescinded the ordinance.

Wal-Mart faces federal charges for anti-union behavior in several states, including Nevada. The National Labor Relations Board recently issued a complaint charging Wal-Mart with widespread violations before a scheduled union election at the company's Kingman, Arizona store. A majority of the 18 employees in the Tire and Lube Express at the Kingman Wal-Mart signed cards authorizing the UFCW to represent them. But a scheduled election in August was delayed after union officials said Wal-Mart used intimidation and other illegal tactics to skew the vote.

The NLRB's subsequent investigation charges Wal-Mart with surveillance of employees, soliciting complaints from workers and making implied promises to diminish support for the union. The NLRB complaint says managers threatened workers with loss of benefits such as their bonuses and discount cards, and changed working conditions to discourage organizing. A full hearing on the NLRB complaint is set for May 1. ■

## Red Squad Returns

The freedom of political dissent in Chicago was severely undermined when the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals eliminated key provisions in the Red Squad Consent Decree. Judge Richard Posner's ruling allows police to collect data on community groups, place those they deem "extremist" under surveillance and film protests. Chicago police claim that these measures are necessary crime prevention tools against suspected terrorists, hate groups and gang activity (see "Red Squad Redux," January 8).

The consent decree was established in 1981 to rein in spying by the police department's infamous Subversive Activities Unit, or the Red Squad, whose methods of harassment and spying led to dossiers on 14,000 organizations and 258,000 individuals—many of whom had never even been suspected of a crime. The millions of dollars spent compiling these files did not lead to even one arrest.

Contrary to popular belief that the abuses were the result of unrest in the '60s, the Red Squad's questionable actions go back to its creation in 1920.

The Alliance to End Repression has filed a motion for the court to hear the case again, though attorney Richard Gutman is not optimistic. "The term 'extremist' is not defined in terms of criminality," Gutman says, "only by what police think is extreme. And this isn't any different from what the Red Squad did."

In a related case, a coalition of groups who protested at the 1996 Democratic National Convention in Chicago also took the city to court, asking that the consent decree be more rigorously enforced. The protesters say that plain-clothed police officers stormed the event, and pepper-sprayed and interrogated participants. The police deny these actions. The judge ruled in favor of the city, saying that the plaintiff's had not presented "clear and convincing evidence." **Geeta Kharkar**

# Enough To Make You Gag

On January 22, his second day in office and the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, President George W. Bush restored in full an executive order banning U.S.-funded international organizations from even talking about abortion. Spun as an "anti-abortion" action, in fact it was an attack on free speech. (Federal funding for abortion has been illegal since 1973.) But even as Bush was gagging women and doctors around the globe, he was giving voice to theocrats here at home.

What could the gag order mean for health providers and their clients? Consider Peru, where abortion is illegal and both a woman who ends a pregnancy and the person who performs her abortion can be punished. At the same time, vast numbers of women are without contraception, sex education and basic reproductive services. Under a previous incarnation of the gag order, Peruvian feminists had to choose between a large U.S. grant to give reproductive health services to thousands of poor, rural women and young people, and their organization's right to advocate for what they believe is best for all Peruvians—a change in the country's anti-abortion law. Painfully, they chose the muzzle.

Although Bush has indicated he'll support the existing \$425 million allocation for worldwide family planning services, Adrienne Germain of the International Women's Health Coalition is fearful that the U.S. Agency for International Development could impose new restrictions on how the money is spent.

A week after his declaration on the so-called global gag rule, Bush announced the formation of a White House Office on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Its agenda: to move more public sector jobs into private religious hands and, not coincidentally, to permit the flow of more federal dollars to religious groups, including those that push the pro-life cause.

Church groups, Bush says, deserve a chance to compete for taxpayer money for after-school programs, prison min-

istries and drug treatment, among other things. To that end, he says, the Republican administration will make "billions" of dollars available for charitable groups that meet social needs. "When we see social needs in America," Bush announced, "my administration



will look first to faith-based programs and community groups."

Rev. Jim Wallis of Call to Renewal, an ecumenical anti-poverty group, is willing to give Bush a chance. At a meeting in Texas shortly before Bush's inauguration, Wallis told him, "Why don't you surprise us?"

There's little room for surprise. Bush's plans expand a Clinton-era program pushed by then-Sen. John Ashcroft (whom Pat Robertson indicated he would name as attorney general when he ran for president in 1988). Called "charitable choice," the program, which was written into the Personal Responsibility Act of 1996, bars the government from discriminating against religious institutions that apply for federal money to do welfare-related programs, including job search and training programs, maternity homes, abstinence education, drug treatment and health clinics.

In a triumphant December 1996 memo to the right-wing Christian Legal Society, Ashcroft answered questions about whether government money might bring with it unwelcome government oversight. Ashcroft reassured his supporters that the law safeguards their right to carry out religious practices on site, including prayer meetings: "Charitable choice incorporates specific protections

for their autonomy and religious character with regard to their right to develop, maintain and express their religious beliefs; to maintain their chosen form of internal governance; to operate their personnel policy in accordance with religious convictions; to maintain a religious environment; and to confine external fiscal audits by segregating federal funds in separate accounts." (The latter is a right forbidden family planning groups under the gag rule.)

As an indication of how he will enforce the law as attorney general, Ashcroft added: "Beneficiaries, by coming to faith-based groups for services may be deemed to have consented to the religious characteristics and practices of a provider from whom they accept service."

Tell that to the thousands of women in communities where their only accessible hospital has been taken over by a Catholic conglomerate and now no longer offers family planning advice or any form of abortion help. Indeed, in remarks to leaders of Catholic charities

**Bush has admitted that his faith-based social services initiative is part of an effort to curtail abortion.**

on January 31, Bush, not realizing his words were being recorded, linked his faith-based social services initiative to his goal of curtailing abortion rights.

As for civil rights, under a special provision of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, religious organizations are permitted to discriminate on the basis of their religious beliefs and teachings about race, religion, sexual orientation, gender and pregnancy status. Look for employment discrimination to increase as more religious institutions receive federal funds. Already, the Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, which receives federal funding, is being sued for firing one if its counselors after a picture of her at a gay rights parade appeared in a photography exhibit at a country fair.

Welcome to theocracy. It's enough to make you gag. ■



# FOLLOW THE LEADER?

## BLACKS STAND BY JESSE JACKSON

By Salim Muwakkil

**W**hen the Rev. Jesse Jackson admitted he had an affair with an aide and fathered a child out of wedlock, media pundits went into overdrive assessing his new infamy. Conservatives abandoned all attempts to contain their glee at Jackson's embarrassment, seizing the opportunity to denounce him for a multitude of sins from hypocrisy to extortion.

Jackson had already infuriated the GOP with his hyperbolic (and some said hypocritical) protests of the great Florida vote theft. So the revelations of his sexual indiscretions, especially the news that Jackson took his pregnant mistress to visit the White House during President Clinton's own sex scandal, bathed them in a spirit of pure vindication. Jackson's black supporters, however, fervently stood by their man and urged his quick return to the fray. Most of his progressive white supporters also seemed willing to forgive him (though many would have preferred more than a three-day sabbatical).

Significantly, Jackson's re-emergence came at the second annual conference of the Wall Street Project, an initiative he launched to help bring African-American business aspirants closer to the sources of investment capital. The captains of capitalism and their black petitioners (gathered at Jackson's behest) greeted him warmly in his first post-scandal foray. But among some African-Americans, this appearance raised more concerns about the quality of black leadership than any revelations of sexual indiscretion. Questions about leadership have been rumbling through the black community with sustained intensity for several years. Don't African-Americans need new leaders with a more mature global consciousness? Is the civil rights leadership still relevant?

Many activists are convinced that the anger stirred up by the presidential election and its aftermath could help power new growth in the civil rights movement. An "emergency summit" was called by the National Black Leadership Roundtable on January 4 to capitalize on the new activist spirit that seems to have sprung from the election protests. The gathering attracted leaders from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the National Urban League, the NAACP, the Nation of Islam, the National Bar Association, the Rev. Al Sharpton's National

Action Network, and other black protest and professional organizations. Several members of the Congressional Black Caucus also attended, along with a number of black elected officials from around the country. Although nothing earthshaking emerged from the summit, the gathering served as a reminder that old-style leadership remains important.

Despite talk of the need for new leadership styles to better deal with the problems of the new millennium, it's old issues like voting rights and affirmative action that still stir the masses of black people. "Jesse Jackson remains a popular figure among African-Americans, because blacks still believe that the

basic fight for civil rights is still going on," explains David Bositis, senior political analyst for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington-based think tank. In its latest survey, Jackson received a favorable rating by 83 percent of those blacks polled.



After his three-day sabbatical, Jesse Jackson headed for Wall Street.

**T**hat hasn't quelled vocal, sometime vitriolic criticism of Jackson from radicals, nationalists and black conservatives. Jackson is blamed by many progressives for squandering a rare opportunity to build on the multi-ethnic, left-populist movement that came together around his two presidential campaigns in 1984 and 1988. Jackson lost his luster when it became clear that he wanted the Rainbow Coalition to serve as a vehicle of his own design rather than a grassroots, nuts-and-bolts political organization. Although there have been concerted efforts to increase the visibility of radical thinkers, they were excluded from the National Black Leadership Roundtable. Such an omission is nothing new. Organizers of the Black Radical Congress founded the group in 1998 to help insert a radical critique into the discourse, but so far its voice has not been heard.

Most nationalists never trusted Jackson. He was seen as a kind of "Rev. Leroy," a duplicitous preacher in black folklore, whose intent was seduction more than salvation. Jackson's current troubles only bolster that portrayal. He did attract the nationalists' attention when he aligned himself with Farrakhan in his 1984 campaign; it seemed to herald an alliance of the divided heirs of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. and the beginnings of a black united front. That alliance soon fell apart, but Jackson has always included issues

dear to nationalists—like economic empowerment and community control—in his pitch. The nationalists have bigger problems than worrying about Jackson, however. While the enormous success of the Million Man March seemed to herald a changing black leadership, Louis Farrakhan hasn't held onto the imagination of the black masses.

And despite well-funded media megaphones and unwarranted appearances on political talk shows, black conservatives have yet to stake their claim on any black constituency. Their "compassionate conservative" presidential candidate employed more race-friendly symbols than any GOPer before him, but still failed to capture even 10 percent of the black vote. Predictions that the growing black middle class would defect from the Democrats have failed to come true.

For their part, black conservatives tend to hold up Jackson as an example of all that is wrong with black leadership. He often is derided as a "poverty pimp" who gains his power only by exploiting blacks' sense of vulnerability. They argue that Jackson and the whole civil rights fraternity utilize a myth of widespread black poverty to more efficiently extract favors from

guilty whites. But given the increasing numbers of black conservatives (as well as a frothing horde of white critics) who are making this familiar charge, it's striking that the masses of African-Americans still support Jackson so solidly.

The 2000 elections have produced a discernible change in the tempo of the black freedom movement. The revelations about Jackson's sexual irresponsibility will do little to taint his luster within the African-American community. In fact, because of the black community's historically honed impulse to circle its wagons when under attack, the scandal may in fact add a bit to Jackson's shine.

The issue of whether his leadership is under challenge is more an issue for whites than for blacks. Whites have always had a vested interest in limiting the range of black leadership. Throughout African-American history, the white leadership of the United States has tended to choose specific figures to represent blacks. In most cases, the leader was chosen for his (inevitably it was a man) ability to reinforce the racial hierarchy. With rare exceptions, black people seldom followed this lead. There's little reason to expect much change now. ■

**"JACKSON REMAINS  
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BECAUSE BLACKS  
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## TAKE ME TO THE RIVERS

George W. Bush apparently has learned from his GOP predecessors about the futility of attempting to cultivate new black leadership in a desert of followers. Instead, Bush appears willing to extend a tentative hand to the civil rights hierarchy even as he enlists more black moderates and contrarians to his cause.

Enter the Rev. Eugene Rivers, pastor of the Asuzu Christian Community in Boston and architect of a "faith-based" program called the Ten Point Coalition that helped reduce the city's level of youth violence dramatically. The program focuses on establishing a close partnership between police agencies and a coalition of black churches—a kind of intensive "community policing." This coalition provides numerous community services with a focus on crime prevention and youth rehabilitation.

Rivers also is a widely published writer whose essay "On the Responsibility of Intellectuals in the Age of Crack," published in a 1992 issue of *Boston Review*, sparked a furious national debate. Rivers struck a nerve by pointedly questioning the relevance of the postmodern, theoretical work of black intellectuals during a period of acute crisis in the black community.

Rivers represents a new approach that focuses much more intensively on internal issues within the black community than with the rhetorical confrontation favored by the Jacksonians. Rivers' credibility as a "race man" is unassailable. He has proven his dedication to the 'hood by providing tangible results. The recent announcement that the administration would open purse strings to "faith-based" programs bodes well for the Boston clergyman's future. His approach appeals to Bush because Rivers makes a powerful argument that programs inspired by religious belief are better equipped to tackle the hard work of community revitalization.

While some are eager to brand Rivers' group as ideologically distinct from the civil rights leadership Jesse Jackson represents, it's not that simple. Rivers' group of clergy, which calls itself the Pan-African Charismatic Evangelical Congress, delivered a list of requests (Rivers made sure to note they were "not demands") to the new administration as a follow-up to a

December meeting the group had with Bush in Austin. Among the items included in the open letter were an increased commitment to Africa, including debt cancellation and massive assistance for AIDS-HIV; health care funding for all Americans, especially children; explicit promises for a plan to expand child-care for working parents; and a call for zero growth of the prison population. This is a list just as ambitious as any that would be compiled by the National Black Leadership Roundtable. However, in his news conference announcing the letter, Rivers said, "We believe in the need for results, not rhetoric."

He then contrasted himself with those protesting Bush's cabinet appointments. "We don't wish to inflame debate of cabinet nominees with facile charges of racism," Rivers said, implying his disagreements with those protesting former Missouri Sen. John Ashcroft's nomination for attorney general. "We recognize, therefore, the need not to risk burning all bridges to your administration and white conservative Republican leaders, least of all over a few Cabinet appointments."

While Rivers' tone offers Bush some respite, if the president thinks these preachers will provide him cover from the demands of the civil rights community, he is badly mistaken. **S.M.**



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# LOOKING FOR MR. NADER

## SINCE ELECTION DAY, RALPH HAS BEEN MISSING IN ACTION

By Doug Ireland

**W**here's Ralph? That's what many enthusiastic supporters of Nader's 2000 presidential campaign have been asking. Even though more people were paying attention to politics during the Florida election mess than they were during the campaign, Nader chose not to go to the Sunshine State. Nor has there been a coordinated effort to mobilize the tens of thousands of active Naderites recruited during the campaign to take their energy into the Green Party, let alone any serious attempt to enroll rank-and-file Nader voters as Greens. Indeed, Nader himself is still not a Green Party member. Nor has any organization been formed to give those Nader supporters who are not prepared to join the Greens another vehicle for independent, issues-oriented political action. So what's going on?

Ask Nader, and he maintains he has been doing a lot. "It's very hard to get press attention, much more so than in the campaign," he says. Undoubtedly true—but Nader gave no press conferences of his own in December or January, and sent out only two press releases; nor did he stage any media events with pizzazz.

And what about Florida? "Medea Benjamin represented the Greens in Florida," he says, "and she did a great job." But the Green Senate candidate from California garnered no national media attention of the kind Nader might have, given the thousands of hours of airtime the cable news networks devoted to the endless squabbling over the vote count.

As for the Greens, Nader says he hasn't become a member because, "I don't want to get involved in Green Party internal disputes and struggles—if I was a member, I'd have to take sides." Besides, adds Nader—who has made it evident he almost certainly intends to run another presidential campaign in 2004—"we've got to appeal to the independent vote" that includes "tens of millions" whose concerns extend beyond the Greens' agenda "and historically, I've never joined any party."

As to his invisibility during the confirmation hearings for Bush's cabinet, Nader says the Democrats shut him out: "I sent letters to [Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick] Leahy—we even had one hand-delivered—asking to testify

against John Ashcroft, and he didn't even have the courtesy to respond." He also tried to testify against Spencer Abraham and Gale Norton, but was refused.

Why, then, didn't Nader hold a press conference denouncing the spineless Senate Dems for their token opposition to Ashcroft—who lied repeatedly without challenge at his hearing—and their failure to seriously contest the anti-environmental appointments of the reactionary Norton and the polluter-friendly new EPA head, Christie Todd Whitman? And when the Democrats symbolized their moral bankruptcy by choosing notorious bagman and fixer Terry McAuliffe as chair of the Democratic National

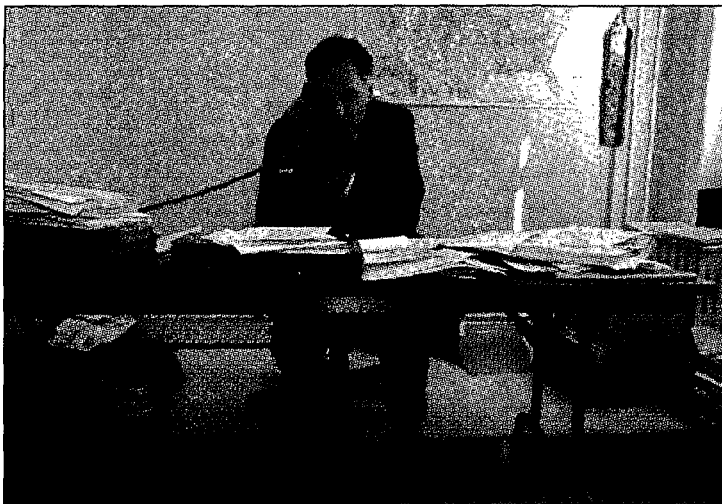
Committee, where were the salvos from Nader? "Well," he says weakly, "I've done a lot of all this on radio."

Nader repeatedly emphasizes how preoccupied he has been trying to comply with the Federal Election Commission regulations governing campaign spending and the transition out of campaign mode, including restrictions on how campaign staff can be deployed to other activities. (Nader's Washington campaign office is still open, but down to a skeleton staff.) "The FEC-

dictated process is very strict and very complicated," Nader notes, adding, "did you know that it costs \$5,000 a month just to rent the software for FEC compliance?"

But as one who publicly supported Nader's candidacy in 2000 (including in these pages) and his symbolic non-campaign of 1996, I feel compelled to be frank: These excuses sound to anyone steeped in politics like "the FEC ate my homework." Clearly, there's more to Nader's absence from the public scene than he's willing to admit.

**A**fter discussions with a number of Nader's closest advisers, friends and staff, a clearer picture emerges. For one thing, Nader has received conflicting counsel. Some of the influential staffers from the Nader-created skein of nonprofits, particularly Public Citizen, have been reluctant to see Nader conduct a frontal assault on the Democrats just before a congressional election year.



"Wait for spring, the time of rebirth," Nader says.

# LABOR'S CRITICAL CONDITION

By David Moberg

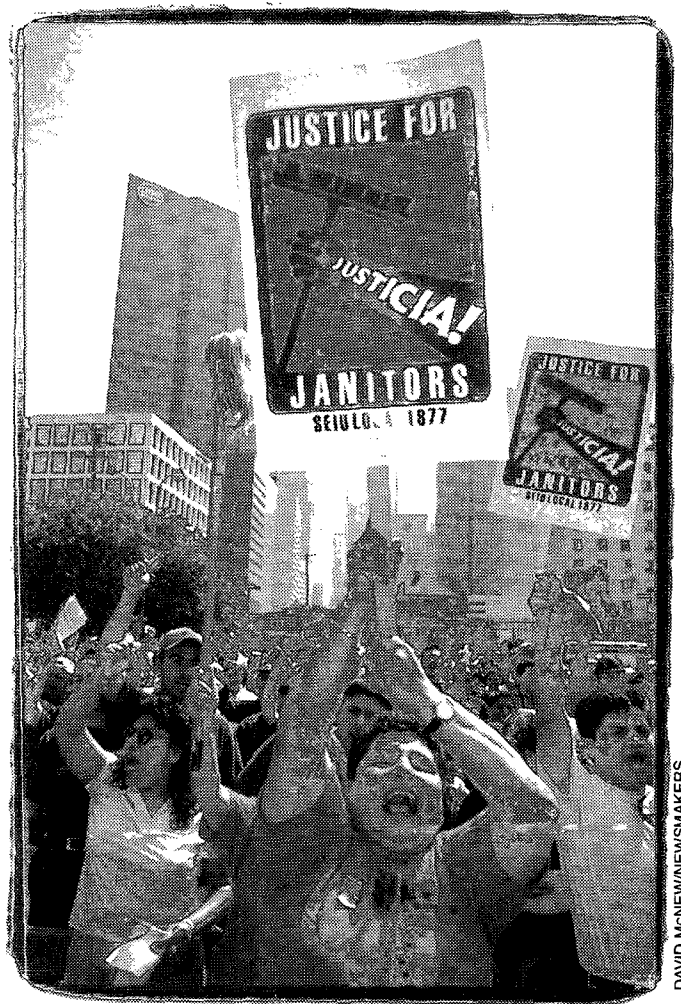
**W**HEN JOHN SWEENEY BECAME PRESIDENT OF THE AFL-CIO in 1995, he set organizing a million new members a year as the labor movement's top priority. Without a turnaround in the four-decade-long decline in union strength, organized labor faced not only losing its power in bargaining and politics, but disappearing altogether. Last year, when the percentage of the work force in unions failed to drop for the first time since 1975, there was hope that the long slump had bottomed out.

That celebration was short-lived. In January, the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that in 2000 the number of union members had dropped once again to 16.3 million, representing only 13.5 percent of the work force, a decline of 0.4 percent from 1999. The character of the labor movement also continues to change: 37.5 percent of government workers are organized (a slight increase from last year), but only 9 percent of the private sector work force now belongs to a union. While emphasizing that there was still a net growth of 150,000 members over the past three years, AFL-CIO organizing director Mark Splain acknowledges that "clearly it's not good news that the numbers are going in the wrong direction."

Although there are many reasons for the renewed decline, the central problem is that, despite strong efforts by a few unions, there is still only a spotty and superficial commitment to organizing at all levels of the labor movement. "We think there's a crisis," says Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees Union (SEIU)—one of the most aggressive organizers in the labor movement—and co-chairman of the AFL-CIO Executive Council Organizing Committee. "What I'm most concerned about is that there needs to be more of a sense of crisis from the AFL-CIO and throughout the labor movement."

The decline of members last year probably reflects heavy job losses in manufacturing, where union density is relatively high, that were obscured by overall low unemployment figures. Also unions diverted much money and staff to politics this year rather than organizing. There were also some big wins in 1999, such as the 70,000 home health care workers in Los Angeles, that reflected many years of previous organizing. The AFL-CIO claims that 400,000 new workers were organized last year (although the running tally in its "Work In Progress" newsletter identified only 160,000) compared with 600,000 in 1999 and 500,000 in 1998. But several experts privately express doubts about the reliability of those numbers.

A few unions are widely acknowledged as organizing leaders, such as SEIU, UNITE, the Hotel Employees (HERE) and



DAVID MCNEWM/NEWSMAKERS

the Communications Workers (CWA). Other unions that have made major new commitments to organizing include AFSCME (public workers), the Steelworkers, the Autoworkers and the Carpenters. But even in these unions, there isn't universal commitment. For example, CWA locals have resisted international efforts to increase spending on organizing, and only a few AFSCME district councils, such as in Illinois, have made organizing a top priority.

Much of the problem reflects internal union politics: Officials succeed by catering to members, who often must be persuaded to spend their dues money on expensive, risky efforts to recruit new members rather than providing services for themselves. Since nearly three-fourths of union funds are controlled by often autonomous local unions, even a committed international union president may have limited influence. Although last summer the AFL-CIO agreed to hold unions more accountable to membership goals, the federation has no power over affiliated unions. Furthermore,

**ABOVE:** Despite energized campaigns like the janitors' strike in Los Angeles, overall union numbers keep falling.

**NEXT PAGE:** AFL-CIO President John Sweeney addresses workers at an "America Needs a Raise" rally on Wall Street in 1996.



despite its continual emphasis on organizing, the AFL-CIO and its leaders often send the message that political work is even more important.

**W**hen Sweeney came into office, the best estimates were that few unions spent more than 5 percent of their budgets on organizing. With a few exceptions—again most notably the SEIU—very few unions reach the AFL-CIO recommended level of spending 30 percent of their budgets on organizing. “There are only a very few unions at the national or local level that have made a dramatic changes,” says Richard Bensinger, the former AFL-CIO organizing director who is now a consultant to several unions. “Most union commitment to organizing is still at the level of rhetoric. You can see substantial growth and commitment in those few, but there’s next to nothing in many others.”

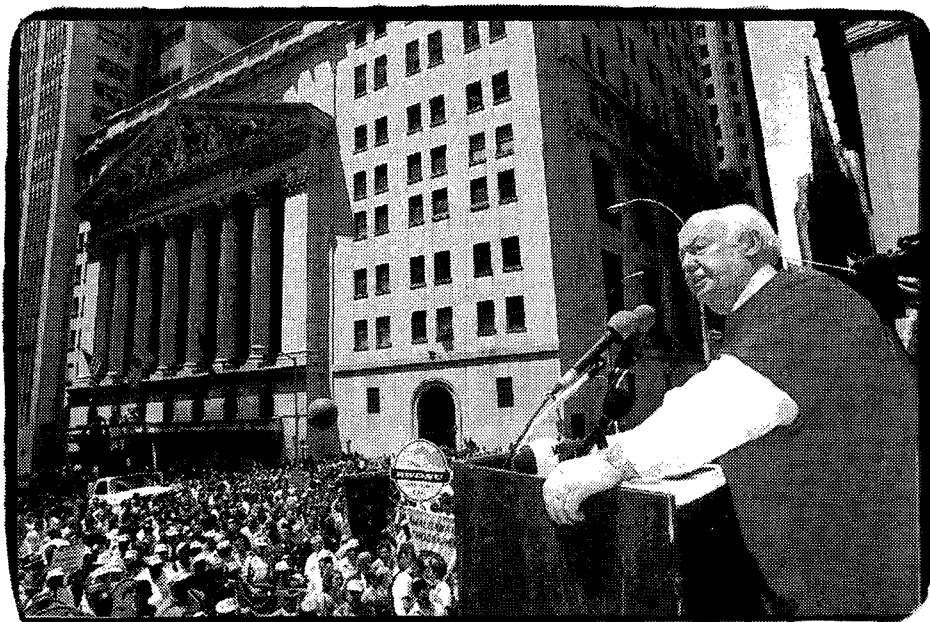
The issue is partly money. “There’s no way to do this on the cheap,” Bensinger says. “The law is too weak and employers too vicious to think we can get by inexpensively.” But the more fundamental issue is changing the internal culture of the labor movement. Starting with Bensinger’s tenure, the AFL-CIO has encouraged union officials and staff to develop a new outlook on their work. Unions like HERE, for example, extensively train union stewards to mobilize members and handle grievances on the job, freeing staff to focus more on organizing new members with the help of newly energized member volunteers. This represents a dramatic change from the old “insurance” model of unions, where business agents handle individual union members’ problems.

Cultural change also demands a new organizing strategy. First, the best organizing unions have moved away from simply responding to “hot shop” calls from agitated workers or desperately seeking new members in seemingly easy targets outside their traditional realms. Unions like SEIU and HERE build on their strengths to develop power in particular industries (the two have even swapped locals). Against great resistance, SEIU’s Stern is pushing hard for all unions to pursue more clearly focused strategies.

Successful unions also approach organizing as a task of building a union at the workplace even before it is recognized, starting with the creation of an internal committee of dedicated workers who do most of the organizing. Union organizers can’t succeed with old tactics of handing out leaflets at plant gates. They must pursue more aggressive tactics such as holding solidarity days at work, surveying workers about their needs, conducting actions on the job, or involving the community—including clergy, elected officials, community groups and the press—in support of workers who are trying to organize. According to Cornell University researcher Kate Bronfenbrenner, unions that used five or more of these “union building” tactics as part of their organizing efforts in 1998 and

1999 were 30 percent more likely to win an NLRB representation election than unions that did not. In the long run, these tactics are also likely to build stronger unions, but they have been adopted mainly because unions needed to counter intense employer opposition.

Consider the case of Certech, a 500-worker unit of the global Carpenter Technology Corporation that manufactures advanced ceramics for the auto, aerospace and electric power industries in northern New Jersey. In 1999 workers from the plant, which primarily employs immigrant women from



STAN HONDA/AFP

**“There are only a very few unions at the national or local level that have made dramatic changes. Most union organizing is still at the level of rhetoric.”**

Central America, contacted UNITE for their third try to form a union. The company responded, as usual, with a campaign of threats, including moving the company to Mexico, bribes and intimidation, even firing seven union supporters. Last March the workers voted against unionization.

But the union worked with the core of committed union members to continue the fight with protests, leafleting and mobilization of support from clergy, local politicians, other unions and community groups. That support gave workers courage to testify at hearings on 70 charges of unfair labor practices that the union brought to the National Labor Relations Board. As the testimony continued into the third week, the company called and said it was ready to negotiate a contract, which was signed at the end of January. The outside support was essential, but the key was a well-organized group of workers on the job. “We put our heart into

this campaign," says regional organizing director Rhina Molina, "but nothing can be done unless the workers decide they want to do it."

**A**t a time when surveys show more than a third of unorganized workers would like to join a union, the chief obstacle to unionization remains employer opposition, which exploits labor laws that have grown weaker over the years. In a scathing report issued last fall, Human Rights Watch concluded that American labor law fell far short of international standards. "Many workers who try to form and join trade unions to bargain with their employers are spied on, harassed, pressured, threatened, suspended, fired, deported or otherwise victimized in reprisal for their exercise of the right to freedom of association," the group reported.

The problem has only grown worse with globalization. Bronfenbrenner has found that more than half of employers threatened to close all or part of the work site during organizing drives, nearly double the rate of threats in the late '80s. In the most mobile industries, like manufacturing, 68 percent of employers threatened to move during organizing drives; those threats cut union wins by about 40 percent. Although the threats (made as often by financially strong companies as weak ones) were often idle, 15 percent of plants where unions won recognition actually did shut down within two years, triple the rate in the late '80s.

The fierce level of employer opposition still chills union organizing, despite improved strategies of the best unions. Unions now win more than half of all NLRB elections (53 percent in fiscal year 1999), but the number of elections held and workers eligible to vote remains below even what it was in the late '80s. Partly that reflects a shift away from NLRB elections to other methods, such as pressuring companies to recognize the union when a majority of workers have signed union cards. Yet the overall picture remains grim: Roughly one-third of the time, unions withdraw even before an election is held, as employer opposition destroys union support. Even after winning an election, only 60 percent of private sector workers typically secure a first contract.

Union organizing increasingly focuses on the nonprofit-private and public-service sectors, where win rates are much higher (often 60 to 70 percent in sectors like health care and finance) because opposition is usually less fierce. With the growing influence of globalization, unions are devoting less effort to organizing in manufacturing, where they win about 42 percent of elections overall—but only about 31 percent of elections in the most global companies, according to Bronfenbrenner. Not surprisingly, multinational companies are far more likely to threaten to close and move than nationally based firms.

Unions like CWA and HERE have led the effort to reduce employer opposition by using their bargaining or political clout to win agreements from companies to stay neutral during organizing drives. But unions have also used their political leverage to make sure that publicly supported local development deals provide for labor peace—no strikes during organizing in exchange for employer neutrality. California last year also approved legislation mandating that businesses not use state funds to oppose unionization. Unions won about two-thirds of organizing campaigns with neutrality agreements, according to a study published last year.

It is also possible to curtail employer tactics in less formal ways. The AFL-CIO has encouraged central labor councils to promote "the right to choose a voice at work" through public actions. Stern wants the AFL-CIO to increase pressure on officials who are elected with labor support to take concrete actions to support union organizing efforts as well as push for local and state legislation, such as reversing right-to-work laws and passing legislation prohibiting public money from being used to fight unions. Splain adds, "The action for us will be at the local and state level where union density, strength, ties to the community are pretty good, like Los Angeles."

**P**resident Clinton did little to help union organizing, and there is no prospect for federal legislation to aid organizing in the near future under Bush and a Republican Congress. Human Rights Watch recommended a long, reasonable list of reforms that would strengthen workers rights in the United States, but the greatest value of the report is in highlighting this country's failure to live up to established international law and human rights treaties. In a related effort, the Labor Party has launched a campaign to ground workers rights in the guarantee of First Amendment rights of free speech and association at work and in the constitutional prohibition of involuntary servitude, rather than a focus on reforming existing labor law, which is based on the federal government's power to regulate interstate commerce.

Ultimately, the most effective campaign for workers rights would be massive organizing drives—some focused on a particular corporation, others on a regional industry or other target—that would combine all of the demonstrated elements of a successful organizing campaign with a high-profile political and community fight to guarantee workers rights. It is unlikely that unions will break out of the cage formed by the law, employer power and globalization until the crisis of the labor movement becomes a social crisis as well. But first the labor movement must recognize its own critical condition and be willing, as the civil rights movement was, to create a social crisis if workers rights are not respected. ■

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# In Greenspan's Court

By Kim Phillips-Fein

In the early '60s, a young jazz musician named Alan Greenspan hung up his clarinet and went to graduate school to study economics. He was an unenthu-

## Maestro: Greenspan's Fed and the American Boom

By Bob Woodward  
Simon & Schuster  
270 pages, \$25

siastic student, though, and his real education came in the apartment of the charismatic writer Ayn Rand.

Rand, a Soviet émigré, called herself a "radical for capitalism." Her novels—part bodice-ripping romances, part tedious philosophical treatises—celebrated the absolute sovereignty of the individual human will. She believed that the postwar United States was evolving toward a quasi-totalitarian society, and that true capitalism was an "unknown ideal." Rand's beliefs extended to the minutiae of life; she chain-smoked because she thought cigarettes demonstrated the Promethean capacity to master fire. When she died of lung cancer in 1981, a six-foot-tall floral dollar sign stood beside her coffin.

Greenspan was one of many conservative thinkers to file past that monument to lucre to pay his final respects. When he was young, he'd been known to others in Rand's circle as "The Undertaker"—a reference to his sober demeanor. Greenspan, who originally deemed himself a logical positivist, was initially skeptical about Rand's ideas. He argued with her for hours about whether or not he even believed in his own existence (eventually, she won him over).

Greenspan was compelled by Rand's argument that capitalism was the only social order that fully unleashed and rewarded individual will and reason. His biographer Justin Martin reports that Greenspan had believed in the technical efficiency of capitalism when he met Rand. But she convinced him of its moral rigor. The substance of that ethos was evident in a 1967 letter he wrote to the *New York Times*, defending his mentor's book against a hostile

review. "Atlas Shrugged," he wrote, "is a celebration of life and happiness. Creative individuals and undeviating purpose and rationality ultimately achieve joy and fulfillment. Parasites who avoid either reason or purpose perish as they should."

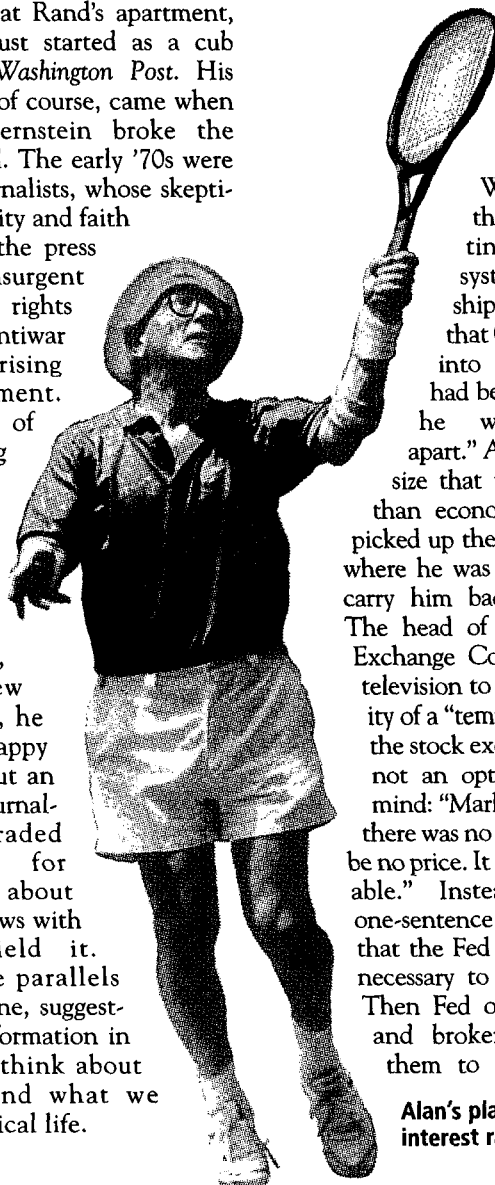
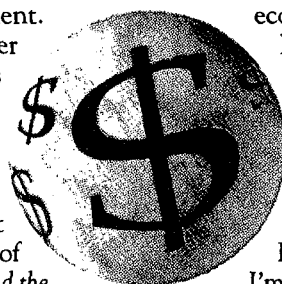
The past two decades have been kind to Alan Greenspan—but not to Bob Woodward, author of *Maestro: Greenspan's Fed and the American Boom*. When Greenspan was hanging out at Rand's apartment, Woodward had just started as a cub reporter at the *Washington Post*. His moment of glory, of course, came when he and Carl Bernstein broke the Watergate scandal. The early '70s were great days for journalists, whose skepticism about authority and faith in the power of the press reflected the insurgent spirit of the civil rights movement, the antiwar protests and the rising feminist movement. With hierarchies of all kinds being overthrown, why shouldn't a 28-year-old topple a president?

But as the political culture grew conservative, Woodward grew restrained. Today, he is no longer a scrappy newspaperman but an Establishment journalist, who has traded independence for access, cynicism about power for interviews with those who wield it. Greenspan's rise parallels Woodward's decline, suggesting a larger transformation in how Americans think about the economy and what we expect from political life.

*Maestro* is written in the breathless tone of a thriller. It opens with the stock market crash of 1987, a few months after Alan Greenspan became chair of the Federal Reserve. The crash—the largest one-day decline of the stock market in American history—looked like it might turn into a "financial Vietnam ... creating the potential for a major economic catastrophe." The Fed had to step in with easy credit, making it possible for banks and brokerages to buy stocks and save the market. For the new chairman, the crisis was a test of character: "Greenspan ... told himself, I'm going to find out what I'm made of."

The crash was nothing short of traumatic for a man with such faith in the morality and wisdom of the market. Woodward writes: "If the stock market continued down, the system—the relationships, rules and theology that Greenspan had built into his head and that had become a part of who he was—would break apart." As though to emphasize that the crisis was more than economic, a military jet picked up the chairman in Texas, where he was giving a speech, to carry him back to Washington. The head of the Securities and Exchange Commission went on television to suggest the possibility of a "temporary" shutdown of the stock exchange. But this was not an option in Greenspan's mind: "Markets set prices, and if there was no market, there would be no price. It was almost unthinkable." Instead, he issued a one-sentence press release, saying that the Fed would do what was necessary to save the economy. Then Fed officers called banks and brokerages, encouraging them to make payments as

Alan's playing with the interest rate again ...

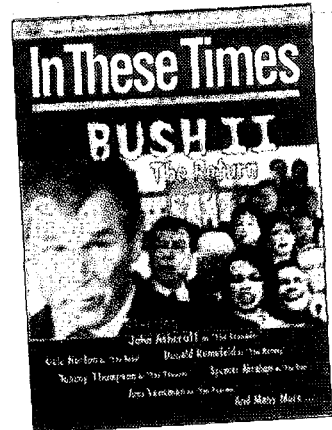


Woodward tries hard to sustain the melodramatic narrative throughout the book, which covers the Mexico bailout,


Woodward has traded independence for access, cynicism about power for interviews with those who wield it.

**D**espite *Maestro's* stylistic resemblance to a political whodunit, the book's real theme is the irrelevance of public life. Greenspan, of course, has never been elected. He is appointed by the president, and his job is to keep the Fed immune from the day-to-day vagaries of political influence. He's protected from public scrutiny, and that's supposed to be best for everyone; few public figures can master the data and intellectual tools that give someone the right to run the economy. Describing a meeting between

This pain in the stomach was a physical awareness Greenspan had experienced many times. He felt he had a deeper understanding of the issue—a whole body of knowledge in his head and a whole value system—than he was capable of stating at that moment. If he was about to say something that wasn't right, he would feel it before he was intellectually aware of



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the problem. ... At times, he found that his body sensed danger before his head. As he walked down the street there would be an approaching car, and his body knew to stay out of its way before his head.

Intuitive knowledge, Woodward suggests, is the most appropriate way to make sense of the economy. The market is fundamentally inscrutable, subtle and mysterious. Greenspan's recognition of the opacity of the economy, and his uncanny ability to tap into its depths, is his true genius, lying beyond the halls of Congress and the world of politics. His brilliance is that he has been "frank enough to stand before the new and amazing economic circumstances that he helped create and in the end declare them a mystery."

Since the market is not comprehensible to ordinary people, we need economic geniuses—with their superior technical knowledge and sublime sensitivity to its ebbs and flows—to manage it for us. Only a "maestro" can interpret the data patterns: "In *The Wizard of Oz*, when the man behind the curtain emerges, we are let down. With Greenspan, we find comfort. He helps breathe life into the vision of America as strong, the best, invincible."

In its reverential attitude toward Alan Greenspan, *Maestro* parts ways not only with Woodward's youthful reporting, but even his recent books like *The Agenda*. These covered campaigns and political intrigue, exposing scandals and uncovering corrupt—or at least ambivalent—public figures. But in *Maestro*, the world of politics seems to have been replaced by one of intuitive knowledge and private, expert decisions that Woodward also seems to agree should be kept out of the public sphere. The job of the journalist is to infiltrate the inner circles of power and expose what goes on there. In *Maestro*, even as he steps into the sanctum of the Fed, Woodward defends the unaccountable power of a few isolated men as right and necessary.

In its enthusiasm for a lone banker—once a private businessman—and its skepticism about the role of politics and public debate in making decisions about the economy, *Maestro* brings to mind the works of Greenspan's old mentor,

Ayn Rand. There is, after all, something fitting about the ascendance of a Randian to the post of Fed chairman in the late '80s. Despite the embarrassing similarity of books like *The Fountainhead* to cheap romance novels, Rand's work tapped into many of the cultural themes that have come to prominence over the past two decades.

She portrayed businessmen as people of consummate force and will, possessing an integrity inaccessible to weaker spirits. The norms of the market present a complete, coherent moral system, which does not need to be tempered by ethical or social concerns. Indeed, it is unjust to inhibit private will through

public choices or regulation. Rand's faith in the absolute sanctity of the market, her moral revulsion to the idea that we can make democratic or collective choices about the kind of society that we want to live in, is echoed today by neoliberal free marketeers—and even by political journalists. For as a young reporter, Bob Woodward might well have raised his eyebrows at the idea that decisions that affect the well-being of the American population should be made on the basis of the stomach-churning of a 75-year-old man. His latest is a political book appropriate to a neoliberal age, in which politics, like history, is believed to have come to an end. ■

## Beating a Dead Elephant

By Matthew Price

It is the face of a man who is always fighting against something ... the face of a man who is generously angry—in other words, of a nineteenth century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated

### Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation

By Jeffrey Meyers

W.W. Norton

380 pages, \$29.95

with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls." This is George Orwell writing in 1939 on Charles Dickens, but these words could just as well describe Orwell himself.

Orwell may have felt hated by the smelly little orthodoxies of his time, but since his death his soul has been up for grabs. For the non-Communist left, Orwell has been the exemplar of small "s" socialist decency; for the right, a prophet against totalitarianism. What other writer could unite Christopher Hitchens and Norman Podhoretz under the same banner?

But Orwell was *sui generis*, and his own fiercely guarded independence has meant that he can be read any number of ways—and appropriated for just about any cause. While those on the left ignore at their own peril his often cutting remarks about the orthodox left-wingers of his own time, right-wing

critics like Podhoretz and Hilton Kramer do more damage to Orwell when they trot out fatuous exercises of the "if Orwell were alive today" variety when bashing the left. The reason Orwell was such an effective writer and thinker was that he wrote not in the service of dogmatic imperatives, but rather of his own hard-headed opinions, which often annoyed his nominal allies on the left. "A writer cannot be a loyal member of any political party," he once wrote.

Any biographer of Orwell has to take into account the often conflicting impulses that made up his sometimes

**Orwell's fiercely guarded independence has meant that he can be read any number of ways—and appropriated for just about any cause.**

maddening character. He is a hard subject to pin down. *The Road to Wigan Pier* so infuriated its publisher, Victor Gollancz, because of its vituperative asides on socialists that he wrote an introduction alerting the reader to Orwell's rather eccentric opinions about the left. "He is

at one and the same time an extreme intellectual and a violent intellectual," Gollancz noted. "Similarly he is a frightful snob ... and a genuine hater of every form of snobbery." So just who was Orwell?

He was clearly his own man. Or many men, as Jeffrey Meyers writes in his new biography, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation*: "Orwell never could—perhaps never wanted to—resolve the contradictions of his elusive character: Etonian prole, anti-colonial policeman, bourgeois bum, Tory anarchist, Leftist critic of the Left, puritanical lecher, kindly autocrat."

This is a perceptive remark in an otherwise uninspired biography, one filled with the usual glib hallmarks of Meyers' style. A depressingly industrious biographer, Meyers has made a career writing superficially learned literary biographies. Despite the book jacket's promise of "research into unpublished material in the Orwell archive in London," and the availability of the massive 20-volume edition of Orwell's collected works, this is a largely superfluous work that adds little to our knowledge of Orwell's life.

Born Eric Blair in colonial Burma in 1903, the young Orwell was soon shipped home with his mother to England, where he lived a comfortable life as a member of the "lower-upper middle class," as he once described it. Schooled at St. Cyprian's and Eton, Orwell graduated without many prospects; he was a horrid student. Instead of the usual Oxbridge route of his peers (like Anthony Powell and Cyril Connolly) Orwell opted for the Burma police force, following his father's footsteps. He was to spend seven years there, witnessing first-hand the brutalities of empire; upon his return to England in 1927, he wanted nothing to do with a society founded on imperialism and oppression. As he wrote in one autobiographical passage in *Wigan Pier*: "I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism, but from every form of man's dominion over man. I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against the tyrants." He threw

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Orwell's union card, January 1943

his lot in with the downtrodden and tramped around East London and Paris, changing his name to George Orwell upon publication in 1933 of his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, a semi-documentary account of his time as member of the bohemian *demi-monde*.

By the '30s, the Orwell we know was beginning to emerge: passionate, obsessed with politics, preoccupied with the state of England and the rise of fascism in Europe. These latter two concerns produced his two most famous works of nonfiction, *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia*. In the biography's account of Orwell's time as a militiaman in Spain, where he was nearly killed after taking a bullet in the throat, Meyers benefits from some new material—most importantly an arrest warrant that proves the Communists were after Orwell. This will no doubt please neocon revisionists like Ronald Radosh, who will use it to further cast doubt on the Republicans' cause—which Orwell passionately believed in, despite the Communist interference.

Nonetheless, Spain was a chastening experience for Orwell. Unlike other writers who took up the Republican cause but were mere observers (like W.H. Auden and Stephen Spender) Orwell experienced ideological warfare first-hand, and bitterly attacked Auden and Spender as mere hand-wringers. Orwell came home a bitter foe of Communism, and blamed the left-wing press profusely for their distortions of the Spanish cause. But his belief in his own brand of socialism remained undimmed. During World War II, he broadcast regularly for the BBC, and wrote some of his finest essays, including "The Lion and the Unicorn," where he outlined his views on England and socialism. In 1945 Orwell's satire *Animal Farm* was published, prompting his friend William Empson to write, "You must expect to be misunderstood on a large scale."

And misunderstood he was. *Animal Farm* and its successor, 1984, may be the two most talked-about books of the 20th century. Yet no less than five publishing houses rejected the manuscript of the former. Orwell had to contend with a reservoir of pro-Soviet sentiment, which reached its high-water mark after the Allied defeat of the Nazis. Of all people, even the self-described Anglo-Catholic royalist T.S. Eliot declined to publish the novel at Faber and Faber, telling Orwell "that this was not the right point of view from which to criticize the political situation at the present time."

Eventually, of course, *Animal Farm* was a commercial and critical smash, getting a boost in the American press from Edmund Wilson and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. After this success, Orwell completed 1984 on Jura, a remote island off the coast of Scotland. He ruined his health there, nearly drowning in a boating accident; recurring bouts of bronchitis developed into tuberculosis, which ultimately killed him in 1950. But not before Orwell finished the novel, perhaps the best thing ever written on totalitarianism (both Nazi and Soviet) and certainly one of the most haunting and poignant.



And yet today his legacy is still contested. Intellectuals still debate his every move—witness the recent contretemps over the list of fellow travelers Orwell compiled before his death. Alexander Cockburn harrumphed and spit bullets at Orwell in the pages of *The Nation*, calling him an outright snitch who did real damage to the ranks of the left, and contending that he provided “moral cover for all the Namers of Names who came after him.” To be sure, cold warriors applauded the publicity for Orwell with a “see, he really was one of us” arrogance that misses the mark. What Orwell compiled was in many ways a bitchy catalogue of gossip and speculation—yes, marred by remarks that are crudely racist and homophobic to contemporary tastes—that he traded with his friend (and later literary executor) Richard Rees. If anything, the list proves Orwell was insecure and a little

neurotic, two qualities that are hardly surprising to anyone familiar with his work. (Of the list, Orwell noted “it isn’t very sensational.”) It was a question of degree, something Cockburn seemingly did not, on the evidence of his columns, take into account.

In the end, unlike two other contemporaries, Ignazio Silone and Arthur Koestler, both of whom have been tarred by recent scandals, Orwell’s reputation still stands high and will likely continue to. It is impossibly hard to damn him—partly because he was forthright about his own faults. Biographers love him: There is yet another life of Orwell in the works. But Orwell himself once told a housekeeper that he was the only person who could adequately write his biography. He was probably right. ■

**Matthew Price** is associate editor of *Lingua Franca*.

orchestral strings and sunny-yet-melancholic harmonies, yesterday’s Llamas, borrowing frequently from the Brian Wilson playbook, were not always so reliably high.

A good case in point was 1996’s sprawling 77-minute epic, *Hawaii*, a blissed-out cabin idyll suspended in a warm goo of organs, horns and emotive melody by turns thrilling and tedious; often returning to drawn-out variations on the same theme, the album could have benefited from more Wilsonesque pop concision. On 1998’s *Cold and Bouncy*, the group imagined what *Pet Sounds* would have sounded like in the age of electronica (and twice as long). The title, it turned out, was too accurate: Pleasantly shimmering to a fault, it very quickly bounced away without a trace.

But 1999’s underappreciated *Snowbug* brought O’Hagan’s own songwriting skills back to the fore, blending the far-out editing techniques of *Cold and Bouncy* with a self-assured control over musical influences, which broadened to include the carefree kiddie-rock aesthetic of the Free Design and the genial smarminess of ’60s-era sexploitation soundtracks by Ennio Morricone—all without a single smirk.

However, as O’Hagan tells me over tea at a Chicago café, his erstwhile label, V2 Records, was not that interested in *Snowbug*’s weird charms. Made with the help of several of Chicago’s underground all-stars (Jim O’Rourke, John McEntire, Steve Albini) and O’Hagan’s South London neighbors in Stereolab,

# Good To Be High

By Joe Knowles

**W**e are only three months into the year 2001, but so far, it must be unanimously agreed, the future is a disappointment. Instead of heralding an age of anti-gravity shoes, shiny silver tunics, world peace

**Buzzle Bee**  
**High Llamas**  
**Duophonic/Drac City**

and casual lunch dates on the moon, the 21st century—grimly presided over in suits and ties, or worse, polo shirts—has prosaically carried forward all the unfinished business of the 20th. The future, as it once was vaguely understood in the annals of sci-fi, is a mirage from the past.

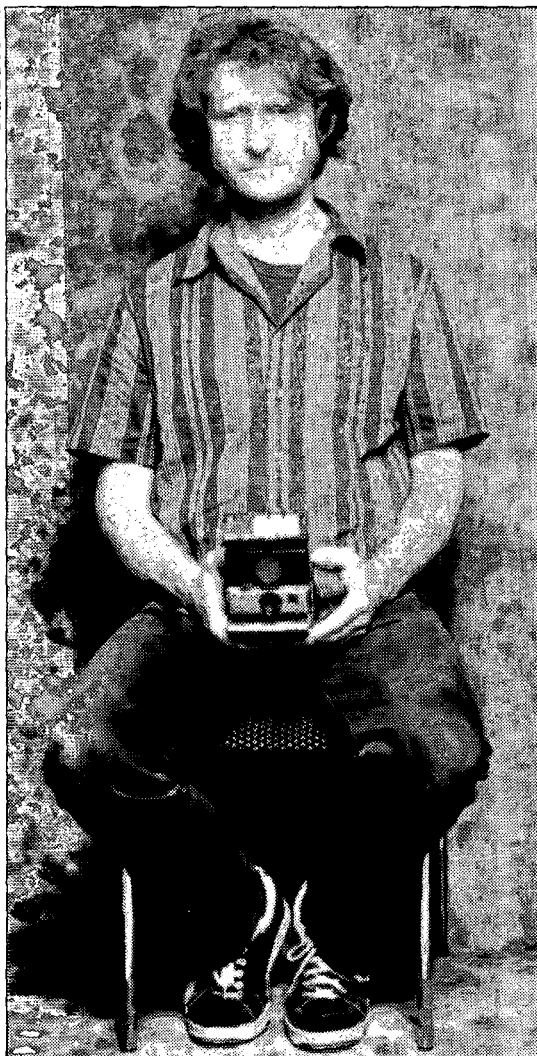
But thanks in part to musicians like Sean O’Hagan, at least one crucial component of that evolved utopia—the soundtrack—is here right now. O’Hagan is the leader of the High Llamas, a strange band with a strange name who have been making beautifully strange music lately. On their new album *Buzzle Bee*, tree-climbing chord

progressions collide with quivering vibraphone and marimba (“Pat Mingus”); oddly sexual French ad jingles circa 1965 recombine with flaxen vocals and gurgling analog synths (“Get into the Galley Shop”); while space-age lullabies float past lyrical impressions of exploration and observation (“Bobby’s Court”). A little bossa in places and very nova all around, this is full-bodied but succinct new music with texture, subtly yet tectonically shifting tempos and dimensions in a gossamer and polychromatic web.

**B**eginning not as a group but as the title of O’Hagan’s 1990 debut solo LP (which followed the breakup of his previous band, the cult ’80s Irish folk-poppers Microdisney), the name stuck when O’Hagan convened a band for 1992’s *Santa Barbara*. The High Llamas spent much of the ’90s crafting a succession of literate and smooth pop albums, earning a reputation as a sort of latter-day British translation of the Beach Boys—for better and for worse. With a consistent mix of gently plucked banjos, trotting rhythms,

**Welcome to a garden  
of incongruent syntax,  
where astronauts and  
mannequins mingle  
with cosmic DJs.**

the American pressing of the album was briskly snapped up by the nerdy muso set. But the label “wouldn’t re-press it,” O’Hagan says. “We were supposed to tour, and they pulled the tours. Everything you’re supposed to do to support a record, they wouldn’t do. And this



**High Llamas' Sean O'Hagan:  
Not going to *Smile*.**

have to say, all the people I trusted and liked at V2 eventually left too." Soon afterward, though, *Buzzle Bee* was rapidly recorded and released to acclaim last fall on Duophonic, the label owned by O'Hagan's old friends and collaborators in Stereolab. (One of Chicago's popular independents, Drag City, picked it up stateside.)

But enough about business, so we change the subject to *Buzzle Bee*'s lyrics, a garden of imagist delights and incongruent syntax where astronauts and mannequins mingle with angels, rye fields and cosmic DJs. I'm particularly struck by "The Passing Bell," the album's entrancing opener, which describes a bucolic daytrip of lazy people-watching; O'Hagan explains that he is in fact singing about William Blake's walks out into the Surrey countryside. "The poets like Blake or Browning are quite interesting figures to me," he says. "These are people out of time, not defined by their own time."

He goes on at length about one Blakean musical analogue, the legendary jazzman Moondog: "This 50-year-old bum, with partial sight, lived in the street you know, making his own music ... he's a man out of time ... in 1955 he was doing this."

Incidentally, this interview happens to be conducted on Election Night, and the café staff interrupt the jukebox with NPR reports of election returns and exit-polling data. As O'Hagan's conversation excitedly swirls with talk of Browning and Blake and Moondog, I cannot help but pause and note the contrast. *Buzzle Bee* makes sounds from some distant future—or some distant past—as it washes over the listener in a timeless ooze. The radio may as well be going on about Nixon and Kennedy, or Truman and Dewey, or Kirk and Spock.

O'Hagan is not alone out there, however. Part of a supportive

community of forward-looking pop alchemists, fans of *Buzzle Bee* should seek out Saint Etienne's recent *Sound of Water* and Kev Hopper's *Whispering Foils*, both of which are graced by O'Hagan's unmistakable arrangements and instrumentation; likewise, any Stereolab album is also worth looking into. Broadcast's moody *The Noise Made By People* is another good place to go, as is Boards of Canada's sly *Music Has the Right to Children*. While the rest of the planet seems stuck in the protracted 20th century, all of these musicians blast off anyway, oblivious to the rubbish clogging the airwaves. The rest of us just might catch up, maybe by around 2101. ☐

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was their argument: Because we weren't going to sell 200,000 records, they may as well spend no money."

The brainchild of Virgin Records mogul and hippie capitalist Sir Richard Branson, V2 originally seemed like it might live up to its claim to marry the personality of a small label with the vast resources of a major. Inevitably, though, it came time to account for the brutal economies of scale in the conglomerated music cartel, where it makes perverse sense to concentrate one's resources on blockbusters (acts like Moby and the Stereophonics, in V2's case) and let the rest wither on the vine.

Hung out to dry and left on the shelf, O'Hagan asked to be released from his contract. "They were quite happy to let us go," he says, with a look reminiscent of a neglected midlist novelist. "And I



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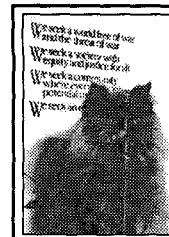
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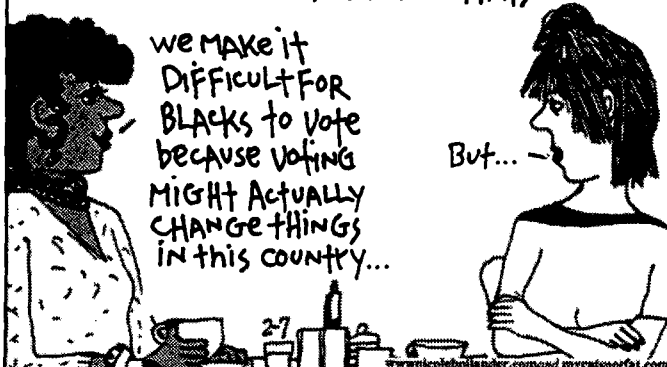
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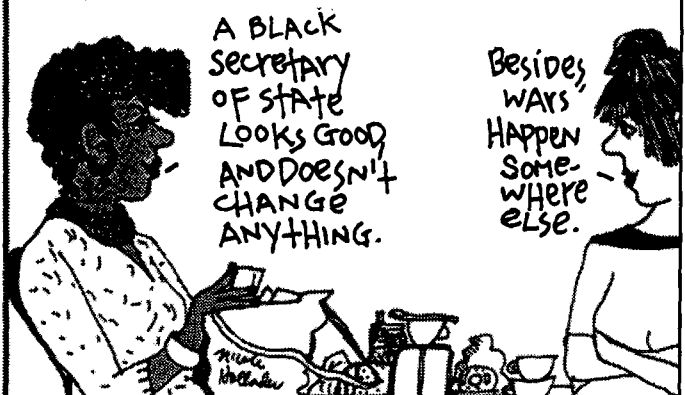
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SYLVIA

## BAD GIRL POLITICAL CHATS



By Nicole Hollander



Continued from page 30

hierarchical, a key to having successfully avoided the dragnet of Milosevic's secret police, and, as the kids put it, a natural response to a lifetime of leadership cult.

Perhaps most profound, the students don't exude a trace of the ugly nationalism that held Serbia in its grip for so long. For the time being, at least, their civic-minded thinking—and the sudden death of the Milosevic propaganda machine—have virtually snuffed out the nationalist jingosim that once poisoned the atmosphere here. Remarkably, on the streets of Belgrade today, the NATO bombing, Bosnia and the loss of Kosovo are non-issues. Like Otpor, people are looking forward, not backward.

With Milosevic gone, Otpor is in the midst of rethinking its strategy and priorities. Observers admit that the movement may have lost some of its momentum. "There's a high level of awareness now," Baralic says. "People saw that power and politics are not exclusive. But we have to fight against inertia and apathy setting in."



**Otpor pushed the message that every individual act of resistance was part of a national movement.**

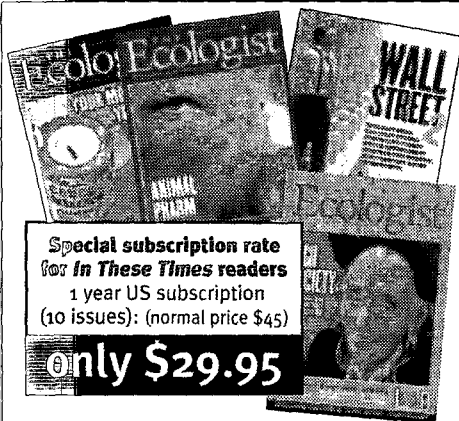
"We don't want another one-party rule."

Otpor is also pushing to cut mandatory military service to six months and offer amnesty to those who dodged military duty during the '90s wars.

The Laibach concert is just one of dozens that Otpor is sponsoring across Serbia. "We know that Laibach poses really critical questions about Serbia," says Jovanovic, referring to the band's use of swastikas and fascist imagery to mock authoritarian ideologues. "But we're not afraid of those questions. If Serbia is becoming healthy again, it can't be afraid." ■

During the campaign period late last year, Otpor mobilized young people to vote for the democratic opposition coalition, the 18-party Democratic Opposition of Serbia, or DOS. Otpor's black-and-white posters, billboards and graffiti blanketed Belgrade. But now that Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic and the DOS are in power, some activists remain vigilant. "Our support for DOS isn't unconditional," says Milja Jovanovic, wearing an impossibly baggy pair of green army fatigues.

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By Paul Hokenos

BELGRADE

**P**lastered alongside layers of weather-beaten election posters, samizdat-style nightclub fliers announce the concerts of KUD Idijoti, Haustor and Laibach, the biggest names from Yugoslavia's New Wave movement of the '80s. Until just recently, not only the guitars but the spirit of the entire urban cultural scene in Serbia had been subdued—and almost completely silenced outside of major cities. Now this country's urbanity is reasserting itself with spontaneous flair, in Belgrade music clubs as well as elsewhere across the country, in the art world, youth culture, media and, not least, politics.

In Slobodan Milosevic's Serbia, the obnoxious repetitive beat of *turbofolk*, a synthetic mesh of techno and folk, drowned out the clever lyrics and catchy guitar riffs of rock groups that 10 years ago boasted followings across all of Yugoslavia. In Belgrade, alternative rock bands were dropped from state-run airwaves, the once vibrant club scene banished to isolated niches. Groups like the punkish KUD Idijoti from Croatia or Slovenia's eclectic agit-provocateurs Laibach wouldn't consider playing Serbia, even if they could have received visas or venues to perform. The same went for artists, theater groups and film companies.

*Turbofolk* was more than an assault on the eardrums, blaring loudly and nonstop from cafés, television sets and taxis. It was a component of Serbia's political ideology, the score to which Milosevic orchestrated his 14 years of rule. On cheap videos, the industry's garish silicone queens glorified the violent, greed-driven life of Serbia's gangster elite. For young people, especially from the countryside, *turbofolk*'s icons became the role models for making it in Serbia. The renowned *turbofolk* star, Ceca, was the wife of the notorious war criminal Arkan, who was gunned down last year in a Belgrade hotel.

"In terms of culture, nothing new was born in the last seven years," explains Natasha Milojevic, a professional journalist and an activist in the progressive Social Democratic Party. "But now minds and ideas are free again to express themselves publicly. Among musicians, artists, painters, our rock 'n' roll culture has been reborn." New art galleries and impromptu exhibitions brighten up dreary Belgrade in winter.

**A** major catalyst in the urban renaissance, and a critical factor in the overthrow of Milosevic, was a student movement, most of whose members were in diapers when

# Serbia NEW New Wave



SASA STANOVIC/APF

Laibach recorded its first albums. The underground youth organization Otpor ("Resistance") combined pop culture and politics, guerrilla tactics and youthful verve to mobilize thousands of people, young and old, across Serbia. Otpor's brash anti-regime slogans and nonviolent theories of resistance took opposition from the cities to the countryside, the bedrock of Milosevic's support. Under Otpor's icon, a simply stenciled black fist, the group pushed the message that every individual act of resistance was part of a nationwide movement.

"The fist symbol itself is pop," says Marija Baralic, 25, a stick-thin Otpor activist with a Palestinian *kaffiyeh* around her neck. Rock bands performed at the first Otpor rallies, she says. "We promoted them because they had subversive things in their music, and they brought in people who were turned off by politics as usual."

Though funded by foreign governments—including the United States—as well as the Serbian diaspora, Otpor's influences are closer to home: the World War II Partisans, the '60s student protesters in Yugoslavia and the '80s Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) movement, a group of iconoclastic artists from Slovenia.

There is also a good dose of the anarchistic, rebellious energy of punk rock in Otpor, but without a Malcolm McLaren or Johnny Rotten, Otpor is leaderless and anti-

*Continued on page 29*